

**Kibbee, Community and Culture: Lebanese Food and Identity in Waterville**

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Food and Religious Identity

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***Introduction: Kibbee in Waterville***

No discussion of Lebanese food is complete without the mention of kibbee. Whether the discussion is simply a description of the legendary dish in general, an examination of the various methods in which kibbee can be cooked (or not cooked), or the type of meat one uses, if you don't know kibbee, you don't know the Lebanese community of Waterville. Surely this is not to say that this singular dish can encompass Waterville's entire particular brand of Lebanese identity. Dishes like cabbage rolls and grape leaves compete with kibbee in popularity, and like many other dishes, represent the local culture in unique and important ways. For some, the memories of cooking Lebanese style flatbread may be their most cherished, and for others, like Janet George, this space will be occupied by *imjadara*.<sup>1</sup> However, unlike these other dishes, an exploration of kibbee can provide a powerful overview of how Lebanese identity is formed in Waterville, and how food has been working to shape that identity for more than a century.

For those who love meat, kibbee is surely a wonderful culinary experience. The dish, regardless of how it's cooked, is made up almost completely of ground meat, mixed together with spices, cracked wheat and chopped onions. For the average American, meatloaf is probably the most relatable to kibbee, however the lean meat required for kibbee separates it from the American staple. Its most often consumed with flatbread, sometimes used to pick the kibbee up off of a communal serving dish and other times wrapped around a piece of kibbee, creating the ever popular kibbee sandwich that sells so well during the church's fundraisers.

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<sup>1</sup> A classic Middle Eastern dish composed of lentils, onions and rice mixed together and boiled.

My own first experience eating Lebanese food in Waterville involved the dish, and it was enough to grab the interest of both my mind and my stomach.

My first introduction to this wonderful cuisine, and to the warm, open and loving community that created it, came in the form of the annual Christmas Bazaar held at St. Joseph's Maronite Catholic Church. Having been invited to attend by the pastor, Father Joseph, I made my way through the building, towards the basement hall and the smell of rich food (which I would soon be enjoying), not knowing anyone and looking, I'm sure, quite out of place, I was noticed by one of the men cooking in the church's crowded kitchen. Sub-deacon Steve Crate, a non-ethnically Lebanese man from outside of Philadelphia who married into the community, approached me, shook my hand warmly, introduced himself. I explained that I was a student looking to learn more about Lebanese culture in Waterville. With a smile and not a moment of hesitation Steve led me into the kitchen and began to explain the process of making *kibbee bi saneeyeh*,<sup>2</sup> or baked kibbee.

The process of making baked kibbee, which at this point I've heard described by at least a dozen informed individuals, was first introduced to me by the members of this kitchen. I saw the two large trays of ground beef, one larger and filled with finely ground meat, the other smaller and filled with coarsely ground beef, the large bowl of *smeed* or cracked wheat soaking in water, and the large bag of onions, some already finely diced and others waiting to meet the knife. Steve and the others

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<sup>2</sup> The Arabic spelling found in the Saint Joseph's Maronite Church Traditional Lebanese Cookbook. It should be noted that even as there are very few (less than five) Arabic speakers left in the community today, those who don't speak Arabic refer to most ingredients and dishes by their Arabic name.

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outlined the ingredients, talked about the importance of the lean quality of the kibbee meat versus the more coarse, and fatty *hushweh* meat that seems to give the dish its distinct taste. I watched as ground beef was mixed with smeed and onions, and small, friendly disputes over the appropriate portions of ingredients sprung up all around me as the different mixtures of meat were layered into the pans for baking. Stories of their mothers' and grandmothers' special tricks were recalled with nostalgia and laughter, and within fifteen minutes of participating in this ritual of kibbee making, it felt as though I'd become a part of the community, receiving personal stories and anecdotes from people I'd met only minutes before as if I was family. About a half an hour later, as I sat and enjoyed a healthy portion of the *Kibbee bi Saneeyeh* provided to me by Steve, I first started to realize how essential this food must be to the Lebanese experience here in Waterville.

As Kevin Joseph, a lifelong resident of Waterville born in the 1950s, business owner, and member of the Lebanese community will tell anyone who inquires; Lebanese food is in general "very labor intensive." Kibbee is one of the least intensive dishes one can find within the cuisine. Despite the fact that kibbee is relatively easy to prepare when compared to stuffed grape leaves, there are important ways which the meat and methods of preparation used here in Waterville can be seen to represent the history of the city's Lebanese community itself. Everything from the type of meat, to the way it's ground, to the shape one forms it into when placing it in the oven can inform us about the history of this community and its place in Waterville today.

However, its important to recognize that kibbee doesn't always make it into the oven, the dish is sometimes enjoyed raw. Jennifer Nale, the twenty year old daughter of local lawyer and lifelong Lebanese community member Tom Nale, described this as "the true test of Lebanese-ness, whether or not you can eat the raw kibbee." Kibbee is prepared in many different ways. Janet George is one of the oldest members of the community and one of the only remaining "fully Lebanese" people in Waterville. According to Janet, you can bake it all together in one big pan like lasagna, or in small "footballs" as she likes to describe them (a naming practice that she identifies as one of the small American aspects of Waterville's Lebanese cuisine), cooked either on a pan or in yogurt. However, the more traditional version includes no cooking at all. When one asks about the more traditional food eaten in the community, raw kibbee, or *kibbee nayeh*, is always the first to be mentioned. Raw kibbee is very interesting though, primarily because of its seemingly polarizing nature. Jennifer explained to me that you either love it, or you hate it, there's really no in between. Unsurprisingly, the enjoyment of raw kibbee is much more common amongst the older generations, and this phenomenon is not lost on members of the community.

Janet George, who is in her late eighties, doesn't make raw kibbee very often anymore since the recent death of her brother, who loved the dish. In many ways, Janet sees the waning popularity of raw kibbee in the community as representative of other trends that worry her. Janet explained to me during one of our interviews, "Waterville is not the place is used to be." She has concerns about the lack of church attendance, connections of younger generations with their heritage, and general

Americanization of the community, concerns that weren't present in the community when she was growing up on Front Street. In many ways the trend of less and less consumption of raw kibbee is representative of these fears. Tom Nale highlights fears over food-borne illness as one of the main reasons for the dish's ever declining popularity. Here the modern aspects of community member's American identities that seem to directly clash with the Lebanese identity they are working so hard to maintain. But at least in the Nale household, three of the five family members share a love for raw kibbee, including Jennifer and her sister. Like the waning numbers of young members of the Lebanese community attending church, the loss of a taste for raw kibbee seems to represent many of the worries which those concerned about the future of the community harbor.

One of the most important aspects of Waterville's kibbee, whether you bake it, cook it in yogurt or simply eat it raw, is the fact that here, unlike the rest of the world, kibbee is made primarily with beef. Traditionally, kibbee is made with lean lamb meat, ground up until very fine. But when this community, made up primarily of poor factory workers and their families, was first getting started buying lamb would have been much too expensive. Janet George recalled to me that she didn't think she'd ever had kibbee made with lamb in her more than ninety years of eating and cooking within the community. Janet's explanation is the same as pretty much everyone else; we were poor, times were hard, and beef is what the community had access to. St. Joseph's Christmas Bazaar features many large pans of kibbee; it's one of the most requested dishes every year according to Father Jensen. But as the celebration serves mainly as a fundraiser for an institution desperately in need of

funding, they could never hope to break even on the sale of kibbee made with lamb. During my latest visit to the church's annual Bazaar Father Jensen had this to add to a conversation revolving around the expense of lamb, "If all this was lamb, we'd need a platoon of guards to defend the kitchen!"

But even for those who can now afford to cook with the more expensive meat, many choose not to. For Tom Nale, the idea of using anything but ground beef had never entered his mind. Beef was what his mother used; it was what he ate growing up among five other brothers and sisters under the care of a single, unemployed parent. To Tom, whether it's raw or cooked, kibbee is not kibbee without the ground beef and this distinction has everything to do with his connection to his mother's kitchen and nothing to do with finances.

But equally important to the type of meat used, is the manner in which the meat is trimmed and ground. Based on whom you talk to, the number of times through the meat grinder required to create the optimal kibbee-consistency varies, but it's always more than once. Janet George goes for the triple grind when she visits the local Hannafords for her kibbee meat, something she insists on every time she purchases. One of the more popular destinations for picking up Kibbee meat however is the butcher's counter found at Joseph's Family Market. Locally owned by one of the most well known Lebanese families in the city, the Market has been in business for almost a century and has been operated by two generations of Joseph men.

Kevin Joseph, the current owner of the Market, explained to me the important role that the establishment plays in supplying kibbee meat for many

members of the community. Every Joseph's employee involved with the butcher's counter knows the ins and outs of preparing kibbee meat. From trimming the cuts of beef of fat, as to make it as lean as possible, to the process of the thorough cleaning of the meat grinder required to provide a product that can be safely eaten raw if the customer so desires, Joseph's employees are required to learn how to do it right. Kevin also subscribes to the triple grind theory, especially when the meat is to be eaten raw; he believes it just doesn't taste right otherwise. In the past, Kevin recalls that the Joseph's staff would grind forty to fifty pounds of kibbee meat for any major holiday, but today that number is usually closer to twenty. This drop off is due to greater rates of Americanization within the community, as families intermarry and some members of the community choose not to continue with their parent's traditions. Another aspect of Americanization highlighted by Kevin, Janet and Tom comes in the form of concerns over food poisoning. These new concerns borne in a high-tech society have made many people in the community think twice about consuming raw beef, another factor leading to the declining meat sales. At Joseph's customers can expect the kibbee meat they receive to be lean and finely ground, just as if it was to be brought home for consumption in the Joseph household, which is one of the many reasons that it is such an important institution to the Lebanese community.

But not everyone gets their kibbee meat from Joseph's, indeed many do not. As was mentioned previously, Janet George often prefers to visit the local Hannafords or Shaw's for her kibbee meat. This highlights another interesting aspect of kibbee in Waterville. I would argue that Waterville exists as one of Maine's



only communities where can one walk into a chain grocery store and order two pounds of kibbee meat without meeting anything but a blank stare from the meat aisle attendant. The very fact that in Waterville, a member of the Lebanese community can expect to receive such a niche service without any hesitation or explanation speaks volumes about the connections that this ethnic community has with the rest of the city. Tom Nale and Janet George both seemed to believe that this was representative of the community's place within the greater Waterville community and the importance of food to Lebanese identity.

Lebanese food is also popular amongst the non-Lebanese in Waterville. More than half of the attendees at last year's Christmas Bazaar weren't members of either the church or the Lebanese community. People come from all over the Waterville area whenever Saint Joseph's kitchen is open to the public, whether it is for the Christmas or other fundraisers, and what draws them in is the food. Not only do these fundraisers offer important financial opportunities for the church, they offer opportunities for the community to display its culture and connect with the rest of Waterville. In fact, after attending fundraisers for many years members of the local chapter of the Knights of Columbus<sup>3</sup> helped to renovate the basement without payment. While they now use the space occasionally for their own gatherings, they never use the kitchen that was included in the renovations. The remodeled kitchen stands as a physical marker, displaying an understanding of the importance of food to this community.

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<sup>3</sup> "The Knights of Columbus is a Catholic fraternal benefits organization headquartered in New Haven, Connecticut."- Pulled from the official website of the Knights of Columbus.

While these fundraisers serve to spread Lebanese culinary traditions throughout Waterville, they also provide a great service for members of the Lebanese community who don't usually cook these foods in their own homes. Eating kibbee and *imjadara* in the basement of Saint Joseph's might provide a Franco-American a small, but tasty window into Lebanese culture. However, what this experience provides for a member of the community unable to eat these foods on a regular basis is a way of connecting with his or her heritage. Every person in the community today does not have access to home-cooked Lebanese meals, whether due to intermarriage, poverty or other factors. These fundraisers not only give these members of the community a chance to eat the food they love and feel connected with, it allows them a chance to give back to the community as well, even if their contribution is only a couple dollars for a kibbee sandwich.<sup>4</sup>

When I asked Jennifer about her favorite memory of Lebanese food, she immediately responded with a story about eating kibbee at lunch in grade school. When asked by one of her classmates, "what's that?" her response was something along the lines of, "its kibbee, duh." She recalls that as she looked back at her classmate's blank expression, given in response to the introduction of a food so important and essential to her identity, she had a realization. "Not everyone is Lebanese, and not everyone gets to try this." In this moment, chewing on a mouthful of one of her favorite dishes, she realized how important kibbee, and the other

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<sup>4</sup> A kibbee sandwich consists of a piece of baked kibbee wrapped in Lebanese flatbread, its generally one of the most popular items at Saint Joseph's fundraisers.

Lebanese foods which she cooked and enjoyed with her family and her community, were to her identity and how special and significant this connection was.

Clearly, there is a deep connection between food and Lebanese identity within the community found in Waterville. Kibbee is especially emblematic of this connection, as the ways in which it is prepared, enjoyed and shared can provide a tremendous amount of insight into the identities of these community members. Discussed previously, the physical nature of foods like kibbee can provide important insights about economic conditions and the status of Americanization within the community. Institutions such as Saint Joseph's and Joseph's Market also have their significance highlighted in this discussion of kibbee, as the services they provide with relation to this dish have a lot to say about their connections to Lebanese identity. Finally, as my experience with Steve Crate in the kitchen of Saint Joseph's demonstrated, Lebanese food not only represents an important connection with the community's past, but allows it to share this history and culture with others.

As this project continues with its goal of understanding Lebanese food culture in Waterville, these same themes will continue to be explored. The following research delves into the history of the Lebanese community in an effort to explain how the distinct food practices found in Waterville relate to the specific Lebanese identity located there. Focusing primarily on the time period between the 1920s and 1960s, the roots of today's Lebanese identity and its strong connections to food will continue to be investigated.

***Eating in America: Immigration and Introduction to Waterville***

While the focus of this research is on the Lebanese community in Waterville, comparisons between similar immigrant communities are vital for a good understanding of how this community is situated in American society. Although they were situated in a different region of the United States, one decidedly more urban than Waterville, the experiences of the poor Italian and Jewish immigrants of New York City found in Hasia Diner's *Hungering For America* are remarkably similar to those of the Lebanese community in Waterville. These three immigrant groups came to the United States for very similar reasons, and once established, experienced similar lifestyles and community formations, including food practices.

Like many, if not most, immigrant groups coming to the United States at the end of the nineteenth century, the Syrian-Lebanese<sup>5</sup> were responding lack of economic opportunity in their homeland, as well as the religious tensions present there. The majority of the Lebanese people who founded the community in Waterville were Christians escaping from the religious prosecution of the Ottoman Empire. Their experience can be closely related to that of the Eastern European Jews seeking to leave Russia, amongst other nations, who fleeing pogroms and other forms of religious or ethnic persecution in their homelands moved to New York City, Waterville and other locations in the United States. These Jews, for the most part extremely poor, found themselves living in small, mostly Jewish communities in

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<sup>5</sup> This is the only time that I will use the term Syrian-Lebanese to describe the community found in Waterville. While at the time that these immigrants were coming to the United States and for several decades during their time in Maine, they were known as Syrian. As Hooglund explains in his chapter on Waterville's Lebanese community, after World War Two and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the state of Lebanon was established and members of the community in Waterville chose to associate themselves it.

their homelands that were becoming targeted more and more for violent discrimination.<sup>6</sup>

The Jewish immigrant community coming from Eastern Europe was also equipped with skills that they would be able to get better use out of in America, where textile mills were in abundance. Jews knew that they could use their training as textile workers in order to find an economic niche, and the Lebanese community of Waterville came to rely on similar skill sets learned in their home countries. The main motivation for the initial Lebanese immigrants to come to Waterville was the presence of several textile mills looking to hire laborers with weaving skills. The allure of these familiar jobs brought the first Lebanese men to Waterville, and provided plenty of incentives for their families to eventually join them.

While they were not necessarily targeted for religious discrimination, many Italians were immigrating to the United States during this time as well. Although those who were moving from Italy to the ethnic enclaves of New York City didn't have the same religious motivations as the Jews or Lebanese, they certainly faced similar issues with regard to poverty. The vast majority of Lebanese coming to the United States were only equipped to work as laborers, some skilled weavers and others unskilled, and much like the Italians of New York they were employed cheaply. The fact that Waterville had so many mills and factories, due to its location on the Kennebec River, made it a natural choice for Lebanese laborers looking for work. The Lebanese of Waterville, and the Italians and Jews of New York, worked

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<sup>6</sup> Diner, Hasia. *Jews of the United States: 1654-2000*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 62-68.

extremely hard in their new, American lives, but they found that the work they put in in America would yield much greater culinary opportunities than in Europe.

All three of these groups came to America at the end of the nineteenth century in similar states of poverty and social standing, and unsurprisingly they also came to the United States hungry. In Diner's descriptions of Italian immigrant experiences centered in New York City, she highlights the centrality of food in justifying their move away from home, "They measured their American lives against remembered Italian scarcity."<sup>7</sup> When coming to America these immigrants knew that they would still need to work hard in order to survive, but unlike in their homelands they found that working hard would often result in being able to eat well. Clearly, for these immigrant groups food serves as the most primary reward for moving to the United States, and one that is immediately celebrated and spoken about.

The Jewish, Italian and Lebanese immigrants that came to the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century found themselves living difficult and labor-filled lives, but it was certainly worth it. While they were still working hard, these immigrants had better opportunities to find work, and in many cases were even able to select work that was suited to them. The Jews and Lebanese are no longer facing the same levels of disenfranchisement due to their religious identities, and in general there is more stability in this land of great plenty. The beginnings of the Lebanese community are not exactly unique in the context of early twentieth century America, but this does not mean they're not important. As the focus of this

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<sup>7</sup> Diner, Hasia. *Hungering For America: Italian, Irish and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003, 48.

research shifts from this initial period of community building to the period of communal establishment in the 1920s, the dynamics of poverty and hard work previously discussed remain vital to understanding identity in this community.

### ***Settling In: Community Status after the First World War***

Looking past the initial stages of community formation for Lebanese population and into the post-World War II era, it's critical to explore the ways in which the community was progressing in this time period. While we've already explored the shared motivations for the group's move to America, and Waterville in particular, it's equally important to understand how the Lebanese community existed and survived in the interwar period. A study of census data collected on the Lebanese community, drawn from the 1930 United States Census, is perfect for outlining their economic and occupational status during this time period. Using data mined from census records, a better understanding of the working class nature of this community after World War I can be obtained.

The census data gathered for this research was compiled through identification of the community members based on their birth country (which in 1930 would have been known as Syria). After identifying the members of the community, data was gathered on their places of living, household compositions, rent paid, property value, educational status and occupations, amongst other things. Averages were determined for the value of owned property and the average value of rent, and the ratio of renters to owners in the community was determined as well. All data referenced in this section, unless otherwise noted, comes from this analysis of the 1930 United States Census information.

Beginning with an overview of the occupational breakdown among heads of household within the Lebanese community of 1930, immediately one will see that the community is still very dependent on employment by the mills. With over eighty percent of the community's heads of households being employed as laborers in the local mills or railroad yards several decades after their initial arrival, it is clear that the community was well cemented in the working class. The Lebanese community was centered in the section of town closest to the mills and factories, known as the Head of Falls. The neighborhood occupied the riverside area upstream of the factories, and featured tightly packed row homes. While some families were starting to move away from the Head of Falls and into more expensive, well-built homes on Front Street and its neighboring side streets, the majority of the community was stuck renting property in the Head of Falls area. Less than half of the families within the community owned their homes, and the average property value of the homes owned, \$5414, fell below the mean found in Waterville's general population of \$5446. The average rent in the Head of Falls area was about fifteen dollars a month, while in Waterville's general population it was closer to twenty-four dollars. This almost forty percent disparity further highlights the intensely working-class status of the Lebanese community in 1930.

While the Lebanese community was still overwhelmingly working class, as it had been at its formation, new patterns of cultural identification were beginning to emerge. As Hooglund notes with regard to the Lebanese population, "The children of the immigrants who were born in Waterville between 1900 and 1925 perceived



their ethnicity differently than did their parents.”<sup>8</sup> Attributing this generational divide to the fact that these first generation Lebanese-Americans were born and schooled in the United States, Hooglund goes on to describe how the younger generations “tended, for example, to be critical both of working conditions and of wages in the factories,” and yearned for an escape from that life for themselves and their children.<sup>9</sup> Like Hooglund suggests, the original immigrants who were swayed heavily by the notion of the “American dream” found aspirations towards hard work, economic success and education for their children as central to their newly forming American identities. But their children, growing up in America and attending American schools, were less convinced by the promises of the “American dream” and “consequently, they were more concerned with the broader aspects of American culture.”<sup>10</sup> All and all, the Lebanese community was starting to realize their American identity as something other than aspirations toward the classic “American dream.” The first generation Lebanese-Americans saw the importance and value of assimilation in ways that their parents and grandparents could never have understood, due to the formative nature of their experiences growing up in Waterville.

This community, while becoming more American, is holding onto old traditions and identities through their food practices. Outside the home and church, the Lebanese work on their American identities, but within these ethnic and/or

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<sup>8</sup> Hooglund, Eric J. 1987. *Crossing the waters: Arabic-speaking immigrants to the United States before 1940*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 99.

<sup>9</sup> Hooglund, Eric J. 1987. *Crossing the waters: Arabic-speaking immigrants to the United States before 1940*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 99.

<sup>10</sup> Hooglund, Eric J. 1987. *Crossing the waters: Arabic-speaking immigrants to the United States before 1940*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 99-100.

religious settings identities tied to Lebanese-ness other identities are formed. By looking at the food practices key to these ethnic and/or religious settings during the first half of the twentieth century and into the second, we can get a better idea of how Lebanese identities were negotiated and how food was essential to the negotiation and formation of these identities.

### ***Forming a Lebanese-American Identity Through Food:***

After the end of the First World War and the fall of the Ottoman Empire Lebanese travel between Syria/Lebanon and the United States came to a complete halt.<sup>11</sup> The result was that communities like the one in Waterville became more stable, the population was fixed in Maine, and Waterville became their permanent home. The Lebanese community, mostly composed of skilled laborers working in the local mills, is still living in relative poverty and experiencing difficult times in the Interwar period. By examining at the ways in which the community managed to provide for its members through open kitchens, communal meals, and church fundraisers, and the importance these practices had in forming an ethnic Lebanese identity, we can see how food practices were integral in forming community's status as an ethnic enclave within the city of Waterville.

In her work on ethnicity in Waterville, Amy Rowe identifies two communities within the city of Waterville that qualified as ethnic enclaves throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the French-Canadian and Lebanese. Rowe notes that

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<sup>11</sup> Hooglund, Eric J. 1987. *Crossing the waters: Arabic-speaking immigrants to the United States before 1940*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 95.

while there were a variety of ethnic groups located in the city during this time period, only the Franco and Lebanese communities qualified as “ethnic enclaves”.<sup>12</sup> Pulling on Peter Kwong’s definition of the ethnic enclave, referring to any ethnic groups who can “employ capital, professional skills and labor from within their own immigrant ghettos to create viable economic structures that offer better pay, more promotional opportunities and greater chances of self-employment for the residents than had they gone into the mainstream American labor market.”<sup>13</sup> While Kwong’s definition of the ethnic enclave provides a focus on the economic and labor aspects of such communities, both he and Rowe note that the most important part of an ethnic enclave is its ability to “transplant institutions from their countries of origin.”<sup>14</sup> I would argue that food practices represent one of the most important ethnic institutions within most communities, and that this is certainly true for the Lebanese community of Waterville.

Returning briefly to Kibbee, by the end of the First World War it has become a beef dish in Waterville, the traditional choice of lamb long forgotten due to its price. In certain ways, this shift in meat choice for kibbee connects to the community’s status as an ethnic enclave. The community is still Lebanese and the people are still together (kibbee is still eaten), but the context has changed (lamb to beef). The poor in Lebanon would have eaten lamb because it was more available, but in the United States beef fills that role. The beef kibbee and ethnic enclave can

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<sup>12</sup> Rowe, Amy. “Exploration of immigration, industrialization & ethnicity in Waterville, Maine.” Senior Honors Thesis, Colby College, 2008, 119.

<sup>13</sup> Kwong, Peter. “Manufacturing ethnicity.” *Critique of anthropology* 17, no. 2 (1997): 365.

<sup>14</sup> Rowe, Amy. “Exploration of immigration, industrialization & ethnicity in Waterville, Maine.” Senior Honors Thesis, Colby College, 2008, 119.

both be seen as attempts to recreate the old world within the context of a new one. The making of kibbee, however, is not the only food practice affected by the community's status as an ethnic enclave.

Every time that Janet George, who again was born during the 1920s to two Lebanese immigrants, and her childhood friend Danny see each other, a story about food from their childhood inevitably comes up. Danny's favorite story about Janet's mother's bread does an excellent job of introducing us to the dynamics surrounding food within the Lebanese community of the 1920s and 30s. Danny's story always begins the same way, describing the fresh bread that Janet's mother, and other matrons of the community, cooked on an almost daily basis. It was not uncommon during this time for a woman in the community use up a whole twenty-five pound bag of flour in the process of making the classic middle-eastern flatbread, known in the community as Lebanese bread. The end product would be a mountain of circular flatbreads, waiting to be consumed with every meal, holding some foods together and soaking up others.

After recalling the bread he enjoyed so much as a child, Danny never fails to explain that even if Janet's mother happened to be cooking something else that day, he had other options. "If I went over to Janet's house and her mother wasn't baking, I'd go to Ms. Carter's house, and if she wasn't baking bread either, I'd go further down the street to my Aunt's house." On any given day, if one woman in the community wasn't baking bread, it could be easily assumed that walking a few houses down through the Head of Falls neighborhood one could find someone who was.

Not only could you find a home where Lebanese bread, kibbee, or cabbage rolls were being prepared, members of the community would be welcomed in to enjoy these foods without a second thought. Janet recalls her mother's open door policy when it came to their dining room and kitchen, specifically remembering that for any given meal you'd have no idea who might be seated around her mother's table. Tom Nale's mother also employed similar policies. Tom's mother, who grew up in Waterville during the 1920s with Janet and Danny, was extremely poor her entire life, continuing into her time as a mother beginning in the 1940s. As she often needed help growing up, Tom recalls that his mother "gave everything she had away," a practice that reflected her recognition of the importance of community support, especially when it came to food. While there weren't always seats available at her table, she always made extra food, sending Tom to deliver it to members of the community who needed it most. Here, we can see clearly how food practices are functioning to strengthen communal bonds. The fact that food is the site of this bonding is extremely revealing. Clearly, in these interactions including the sharing of food that result in communal bonding, the importance of food to Lebanese identity is displayed.

A key component in fully understanding the importance of food in this community, especially as it relates to identity creation, is to recognize the role it played as a refuge in an otherwise difficult existence. Hasia Diner highlights similar realities within the communities of Italian immigrants coming to the United States that we discussed in detail earlier. She begins her chapter devoted to the subject by discussing a quote from one community member regarding life in America, "The

bread is soft, but life is hard.”<sup>15</sup> As Diner suggests, this quote from a letter sent back home to Italy in the 1910s, and its focus on the bread, shows us the utter importance of food within this culture. Diner explains that by appropriating certain foods available in America as “Italian,” and by integrating these foods into their everyday lives, “These immigrants derived not only an ethnic identity but a sense of well-being.”<sup>16</sup> Looking back at the importance of bread to Lebanese food identity, bread which was made with the same flour and water which Waterville’s French Canadian, or even Jewish, bread would be composed of, we can see an example of the Lebanese appropriation of certain American foods as Lebanese. This appropriation leads to bread playing an integral role in defining both Lebanese cuisine and who is a part of the community. It’s not the bread itself, but the ways in which the bread is seen as Italian or Lebanese that is important and leads to the formation of identity.

When discussing her childhood growing up after the First World War, Janet George puts her family’s situation simply, “we were very poor.” However, in describing her family life, she makes sure to note that there was never a shortage of food. Her mother was always working hard in the kitchen to make sure that there would be food on the table, and enough food so that whomever might knock on the door could be fed in addition to her family. For Janet, her time spent in the kitchen with her mother and at the table with her family was extremely valuable; simply because it made up the vast majority of the family time she would experience growing up. With members of the family working long shifts at the mills, often

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<sup>15</sup> Diner, Hasia. *Hungering For America: Italian, Irish and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003, 48-49.

<sup>16</sup> Diner, Hasia. *Hungering For America: Italian, Irish and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003, 50.

during different parts of the day or night, the time spent cooking and eating with her family took on special significance.

This experience was not specific to Janet, as Tom Nale recalls his childhood during the late 1940s into the 50s, and being raised by a single mother. With only a one hundred and forty dollar welfare check once a week, Tom's mother not only managed to successfully raise her six children, she managed to feed them well. According to Tom, his mother spent all day everyday cooking, "And that's how we were able to eat, I mean really eat well, because my mother was cooking all the time, and that's what brought us all together." Like Janet, although it was a couple decades later, Tom's family was struggling to get by, and as a result, family time was brought to a minimum. However, as Tom recalls, "With the food, we all contributed, we all did something, we all talked and looked at each other while we were doing this, and the smell, the aroma, the texture, you just don't forget it." Within the Nale household, family time was composed of cooking and eating together, and for Tom this family time was integral to the formation of his Lebanese identity.

What is truly remarkable about Tom's experience is that despite the fact that his children have grown up in an environment of wealth, so different from his own childhood, he has been able to pass on the deep sense of connection to this food to them. As Tom remarked to me, "The recipes were very difficult to come by with my mother," because she never wrote them down, everything was done by touch and memory. But through this practice of never writing these important recipes down, he became closer to his mother and to his family. Learning these recipes through repeating them over and over again with his mother, brothers and sisters, who all

had a place in the kitchen, became a way of both getting closer to his family and his heritage. When asked by his wife what he does for a certain recipe he says, “This is not what I do, its what my mother did.” Recognizing the absolute importance of these experiences in the kitchen with his family to his identity as a member of the Lebanese community, he has worked hard to make sure that his children all experienced something similar. While his mother was still alive, he, she and all of the children would spend hours in the kitchen, and Jennifer Nale, cites this as an integral part of her Lebanese identity, cooking the way her grandmother did. At the end of her life, as Tom puts it, his mother “had nothing to give, because she’d given everything away.” But what she did leave behind, her rolling pin and apron, have become central to Tom’s cooking tradition. Every piece of zatar bread, the dough mixed just the way his mother would do it, becomes flattened by the same rolling pin that she used for many decades, while Tom wears the apron which his mother donned every day of his childhood. If indeed we receive our ethnicity from our families and communities, it is certain that Tom and his children have received their ethnic identities through their experiences in his mother’s kitchen, cooking based on memory, doing it his mother’s way.

Looking at the experiences of Tom and Janet, I believe it’s important to recognize the importance of the home kitchen as an institution within the Lebanese culture, absolutely integral to the community’s identity as ethnically Lebanese, and vital to defining the community as an ethnic enclave. During this time period, the home kitchen was the place where children spent time with their mothers, women who spent most of every day cooking in order to provide for their children, and thus



a strong connection between these spaces and family identity becomes formed. Kevin Joseph's memories of his family dinners growing up in the 1950s were dominated by one central theme, the women were there to wait on the men. Kevin recalls wives standing behind their husbands as they ate, waiting for them to finish before sitting down to eat themselves. As was the case within the Italian communities of New York City described by Diner<sup>17</sup>, the main job of the Lebanese wife and mother was to provide food for the family, thus placing the ethnic cuisine within their domain. This role of being the provider of food and the corresponding role that the women's kitchen would assume, place both at the center of identity transmission via food culture.

Given that the vast majority of the community was living under similar circumstances to the Nales and Georges, with family time being spent around the table (and with similar Syrian/Lebanese cuisine on that table), I believe that a claim placing the home kitchen as a central location for the formation of Lebanese identity is not unfounded. Looking at what comprises the experiences based in these kitchens, we can see two major factors that led to identity formation. Time spent with family and identification with a specific cuisine, were major factors clearly present and working in important ways. A communal identity is formed around difficult economic conditions, resulting in familial relationships that revolve around one of life's most basic requirements, food. But not only are the families in this community experiencing their familial time in the same way, they're sharing the same cuisine, which simultaneously brings the community together, while at the

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<sup>17</sup> Diner, Hasia. *Hungering For America: Italian, Irish and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003, 78-79.

same time separating it from other economically struggling ethnic communities. As Tom Nale said with regard to the place of food within the community, “It was food that brought us to the table, brought us close to each other, brought us close to our mother or father, if you had one, and brought us closer to the church.”

Local businesses that sold either Lebanese food, or the ingredients required to make Lebanese food, became important institutions within the ethnic enclave. Returning to Diner’s narrative on Italian-American immigrant communities, she states “selling food represented a chance to go into business for oneself and capitalize upon community taste.” Within these communities, Diner discusses the existence of stores that sold Italian foods. She highlights the fact that while these stores could have never been supported without the presence of the immigrant community, they also played an integral role in enabling Italian-Americans access to the ingredients they needed.<sup>18</sup>

I believe we can see similar dynamics, although on a much smaller scale, within the Lebanese community of Waterville. After running Joseph’s Family Market, a small grocery with a butcher’s counter that sells Lebanese food staples, for almost forty years with his brother, Peter Joseph knows the importance of Joseph’s Market for providing specialty foods needed by his community. Peter’s uncle started Joseph’s in the 1920s, and it has been in the family ever since. While the market has sold and made most of its money off of “American” fare throughout its entire existence, Peter will emphasize the fact that Joseph’s has always had the foreign ingredients needed by the community. His nephew, and the current owner

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<sup>18</sup> Diner, Hasia. *Hungering For America: Italian, Irish and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003, 65-66.

of Joseph's Market, Kevin Joseph, explained to me that "you can't buy Lebanese food in stores," and part of the reason for that is that the cuisine uses ingredients from the Middle East, rarely used in American cuisine.

Another reason you can't usually find Lebanese food pre-prepared in stores is its level of labor intensity. Kevin described the fingers of the older women in the community when trying to demonstrate the level of labor involved with the food. Curved from many years of rolling cabbage and grape leaves one at a time, the fingers of the community's older women reflect both their lifelong connection with the cuisine and the labor that goes into doing it right. Looking back at meat grinding practices required for good kibbee, Joseph's has provided a niche service since the 1920s. Triple grinding meat through the specially cleaned and maintained grinder was a service that until the 1960s and 70s, as Janet recalls, was simply not available outside of Joseph's.

Both Kevin and Peter will speak in great lengths about the importance of their store within the community, but both also recognize the fact that without the community, the store could have never formed in the way it did with a row in the back devoted to Lebanese foods. Tom Nale remembers being sent down to Joseph's on an almost daily basis to pick up whatever was needed by his mother in the kitchen, sometimes flour, but other times specialty items such as smeed or grape leaves unavailable elsewhere. To Tom, Joseph's is closely connected to his Lebanese identity. Both because of his memories of running errands for his mother and the inherent connections between those memories and his mother's kitchen, but also due to the fact that Joseph's Market represents one of the only local establishments

tied to Lebanese ethnicity that still exists today, one that he can remember visiting as a child in the 1950s, again emphasizing the important connections between food and ethnicity.

However, Joseph's Market does not represent the only food-based Lebanese owned establishment in the city. According to Janet George, as soon as there were Lebanese people in Waterville, restaurants began to open within the community. Janet recalls that her grandmother was the first member of the community to open up a restaurant, initially serving food out of her own kitchen as early as 1910. While Janet's grandmother's home-based restaurant mostly sold simple Lebanese staples like flatbread and meat pies to factory laborers, by the time she moved her business out of her home to Temple Street around 1930, the cuisine had shifted towards much more mainstream American fare in order to appeal to a larger and more economically viable number of diners.

Unlike the Italian-Americans in New York City, who were able to open large quantities of "authentic Italian" restaurants due to the vast population of immigrants looking to eat that specific cuisine in order to feel more at home,<sup>19</sup> there simply weren't enough people interested in eating Lebanese food (at least outside of their homes) to support a fully-Lebanese restaurant. Instead, people like Janet's grandmother who started George's (a restaurant that had lasted in one form or another until 2008), aimed to create American restaurants with a Lebanese twist. Both George's and The Elm Street Restaurant, which were both locally and Lebanese owned restaurants opened, featured primarily American fare all throughout the first

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<sup>19</sup> Diner, Hasia. *Hungering For America: Italian, Irish and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003, 66.

half of the twentieth century. Although these restaurants catered to Waterville's population via American cuisine, Janet and Peter Joseph recall that on special days of the week, Lebanese food would be served. Like the Italian restaurants of New York City, these restaurants did try to provide an "authentically Lebanese" menu, if only once a week or twice a month. The similarities between these two communities with regard to restaurants reflect the shared importance of food identity to ethnicity, both communities want to be able to transplant pieces of their ethnic identities, and the differences simply reflect a large difference between the populations of the two.

***Saint Joseph's: Where Food, Ethnicity and Religion Meet***

Certainly, no worthwhile investigation of the Lebanese culture in Waterville would be complete without exploring the local Maronite Catholic church, Saint Joseph's. Opened in 1927, Saint Joseph's was the first Maronite church in Waterville, and the only one who offered services in Aramaic. Previously attending services at other Catholic churches in the city, the Lebanese community finally had a church of their own.<sup>20</sup> The church's connection to Lebanese food is about as old as the institution itself, as throughout the many decades which Saint Joseph's has stood on Front Street, fundraisers selling Lebanese food to the Waterville community have kept the doors open and heat on. While primarily a religious organization, Saint Joseph's plays an interesting double role within the community as it seeks to promote both Lebanese identity and Catholic faith simultaneously.

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<sup>20</sup> "Saint Joseph's Maronite Catholic Church 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Book, 1927-2002." Waterville, Saint Joseph's Maronite Catholic Church, 2003, 19.

Within the doors of Saint Joseph's interesting dynamics relating to both Catholicism and Lebanese ethnic identity exist. Much like Joseph's Market, the Saint Joseph's of the Interwar period began as a community institution vital to, and in many ways formed because of, the community's status as an ethnic enclave. It's important to realize that while Lebanese food is important to Saint Joseph's, there exist no substantial connections between the religion and teachings of the Catholic faith (Maronite or otherwise) and Lebanese food. Somewhat reminiscent of George's or the Elms Restaurant, institutions within the Lebanese community which were run by Lebanese people and influenced by their culture but weren't inherently Lebanese themed, Saint Joseph's does a lot of the same work in maintaining Lebanese identity within the community.

Janet George has been attending Saint Joseph's Sunday services for as long as she can remember, and in our interview she made sure to highlight the importance of religion in her life. During her lifetime in Waterville, Janet can recall many periods of economic instability for the church, however due to the fundraising of the community the doors were never forced to close. While times were difficult and interest levels in religion shifted within the community, in the past near century one thing stayed consistent for Saint Joseph's; fundraisers featuring Lebanese food brought people and money into the church. Throughout its history, the food served at Saint Joseph's fundraisers has given both non-Catholics and non-Lebanese a chance to experience Lebanese culture.

Speaking about the importance of Saint Joseph's, Eric Hooglund makes the assertion, "For most of the Syrian community in Waterville the principal influence

for maintaining cultural identity was not through secular institutions but through religious ones.”<sup>21</sup> As Hooglund also mentions, the community was divided along religious beliefs, and in the first two decades of the twentieth century only about seventy percent of the community was Catholic. By the 1930s, about 75% of the community was Maronite<sup>22</sup>, leaving roughly a quarter of the community as members of other religious institutions, if any at all. However, as Hooglund suggests, many members of the community who were not Catholic regularly attended the fundraising events, some even traveled from surrounding towns to do so.<sup>23</sup> Even in these early stages of the church’s existence, the roles of Lebanese food in both community building and the self-preservation of the institution are clear. Although not appealing at this time to non-Lebanese members of the community, Saint Joseph’s utilized its connection to Lebanese food, and more importantly to the ethnic community itself, to survive in its early life.

Moving now out of the Interwar period and into the present day, Saint Joseph’s continues occupy a similar space. While its more ethnically diverse than it’s ever been, Saint Joseph’s continues to foster a strong connection between itself and the Lebanese community. Revisiting my experience in the kitchen of Saint Joseph’s where I was first introduced to kibbee, the doors are now open to everyone,

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<sup>21</sup> Hooglund, Eric J. 1987. *Crossing the waters: Arabic-speaking immigrants to the United States before 1940*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 97.

<sup>22</sup> Number based on a comparison of the founding families detailed in the “Saint Joseph’s Maronite Catholic Church 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Book” with data collected on Lebanese families from the 1930s United States Census. It was found that out of the twenty-two families present in Waterville in 1930, seventeen of them were members of Saint Joseph’s at the time.

<sup>23</sup> Hooglund, Eric J. 1987. *Crossing the waters: Arabic-speaking immigrants to the United States before 1940*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 98.

Lebanese or not. Economically, times are very tough in Waterville and the church certainly feels this. Father Jensen, the current spiritual leader at Saint Joseph's, noted in an interview that without the interest in Lebanese food currently present within the greater Waterville community their fundraisers would not be successful enough to keep the heat on during the winter. Although now on slightly different terms, this Catholic church relies upon Lebanese cuisine in the same way that it did more than eighty years ago.

In this way, Saint Joseph's can be seen to take on a sort of dual identity as a site that works to celebrate both Maronite and Lebanese identities. It cannot be ignored that the vast majority of this community was made up of Maronite Catholics, and that Catholicism played a large role in identity formation for these people. However when one focuses on food practices within the community, Saint Joseph's takes on another, equally important role. It isn't Catholic culture that those in charge of Saint Joseph's attempted to raise funds with, but rather ethnic Lebanese culture, again highlighting the church's dual identity as both Lebanese and Catholic. If we are to look at status of these fundraisers as integral to the survival of the church, which I would argue they certainly are, its important to note their ties to both Catholicism and Lebanese ethnic identity. From the beginning those in charge of Saint Joseph's chose to emphasize an ethnic identity, rather than a religious one, when encountering the non-Catholics of the Waterville community.

### ***Today's Lebanese Community: Food and Inter-marriage***

Peering into the Lebanese community of today's Waterville, a city struck hard by loss of industry since the mills closed in the 1970s, the ways in which



conditions have changed for those identifying as Lebanese are noteworthy. Although the majority of Waterville now lives in relative poverty, the Lebanese community is no longer held within the confines of the ethnic enclave. Members of the Lebanese community, such as Kevin Joseph and Tom Nale, have become successful business owners and professionals. Kevin, beginning his lifelong career as a business owner in his early twenties, has expanded upon the business his father and uncles built after the First World War. Joseph's Family Market is as popular as it has ever been, and the success of this business has allowed Kevin to open a Southern themed steakhouse, Joseph's Fireside Steakhouse. Continuing the tradition set forth by the Market, the vast majority of what you can find on the steakhouse menu is your standard American fare, but if you look carefully one can find a small Lebanese twist. "The Kevin Special," an appetizer consisting of the owners favorite snack, tabouleh, hummus and homemade flatbread, takes on the role of the Market's back row, providing Lebanese cuisine for those looking for it. While "the Kevin Special" is the only Lebanese themed item on the menu today, Kevin has expressed sincere interest in adding more Lebanese fare to the menu, and first on his list is the addition of his aunt's baked kibbee.

Tom Nale, who as you will recall grew up with a single parent living off of welfare, is now partnered with one of his brothers in an extremely successful law firm. While Tom certainly values his memories of cooking in the kitchen with his mother and siblings, times were difficult when he was growing up. In our interview, Tom made sure to express how thankful he is that his children were able to grow up in a more affluent environment. In order to demonstrate the economic disparity

between his mother's household and his own, Tom noted that in one generation his family went from welfare to paying for the Colby College tuition of all three children one hundred percent out of pocket. However, it must be noted that even though this community has broken out of the ethnic enclave, and in general is experiencing better economic times, the connection to Lebanese food so important to those struggling through the Interwar period remains strong.

Perhaps the clearest example of the community's lasting attachment to Lebanese cuisine comes when one examines patterns of intermarriage within the community. As was noted previously, after the completion of the First World War and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, immigration between the United States and what would become known as Lebanon ceased completely. In 1924 the Johnson-Reed act was passed, thus further limiting the number of immigrants able to move to Waterville. The result of this was a stagnant population of ethnically Lebanese people who could not continue to thrive by marrying within their community.<sup>24</sup> In addition, unlike other immigrant groups such as the Jews, Lebanese communities such as the one found in Waterville were rare. Thus, the chances of marrying another Lebanese individual, even drawing from other communities in the United States, was on a heavy decline by the end of the Second World War. The result of this conditions was a spike in rates of intermarriage amongst the Lebanese of Waterville, who given a lack of Lebanese partners and a surplus of Catholics within the community, often chose to marry within their religion if not in their ethnic group.

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<sup>24</sup> Hooglund, Eric J. 1987. *Crossing the waters: Arabic-speaking immigrants to the United States before 1940*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 95.

However, even after more than a half-century of continued intermarriage, ties to Lebanese identity remain strong. Janet George identifies as one of the few remaining living members of the community with fully Lebanese heritage, but she's not bothered the trend of intermarriage. While she's certainly proud of her fully Lebanese blood, she doesn't think of those who marry in or children of intermarried couples as any less Lebanese. For as long as she can remember her attitude towards marriages outside of the community has been, "Who ever they marry, they marry." Janet is proud of the community's status as "a league of nations," and indeed she recognizes that integration into American culture was necessary for the survival of her community. Equally important to the survival of ethnic identity within this community facing rampant intermarriage is the continued importance knowing, preparing and eating Lebanese food.

Few people's experiences marrying into the Lebanese community can tell us more about the inexorable tie between food and identity than that of Steve Crate. As was mentioned before Steve grew up outside of Philadelphia in a Protestant household. Coming to Waterville for business almost forty years ago, Steve met his wife and quickly fell in love. Soon after meeting his soon-to-be-spouse's parents, it was made clear to Steve that the conditions of his marriage would include both a conversion to Catholicism and embracing of Lebanese identity and culture. Leading a deeply religious life up to his move to Waterville, Steve had always fostered an interest in Eastern forms of Christianity, and the conversion to Maronite Catholicism was relatively easy. Embracing the faith quickly Steve has spent several decades studying under Saint Joseph's current Deacon and one of the original owners of

Joseph's Market, Peter Joseph. Having recently obtained the position of Sub-Deacon within the church, Steve is expected to take over for Peter when the time comes.

In tandem with his lasting dedication to the religion of his wife's family, over the last three and a half decades Steve has gone from an uninformed newcomer, to one of the resident experts on Lebanese cuisine within the community today. Again fostering a life long interest, Steve's preexisting love of the kitchen and food made his transition into the ethnically Lebanese community easier than it may have been. Steve recalls his experiences learning to cook from his wife's mother and aunts as his introduction to the Lebanese community, learning what it meant to be Lebanese in Waterville by perfecting his baked kibbee and zatar bread. Citing it as a rite of passage, Steve developed stronger relationships with his wife's family and community through his time spent in the kitchen than anywhere else. Hearing him speak about the warmth he felt being introduced to the community through the kitchen and the cuisine, echoes of our initial interaction inside the kitchen of Saint Joseph's bounced around my head and I was able to see clearly where his openness and enthusiasm came from.

Although they certainly don't cook Lebanese food every night in their home, the Crate family has a strong connection to Lebanese food. Despite intermarried parents, all three of Steve's children share both a strong sense of Lebanese identity and a deep love of the food. Steve's oldest son, now starting his own family, recently requested a copy of their collection of Lebanese recipes for his own household. Hoping to foster a sense of Lebanese identity in his children, Steve's oldest son is following in his parent's footsteps, introducing grape leaves, cabbage rolls, and

kibbee to his children at an early age. Steve's dedication to Lebanese culture is clearly reflected in his children, displaying just how critical food is to this identity formation.

Today, Steve identifies as both Maronite Catholic and Lebanese. His status as a Catholic is reinforced by his continued dedication to Saint Joseph's, reflected in his position as Sub-Deacon. In addition to taking over the position of Sub-Deacon, Steve is often in charge of the kitchen during the church's fundraisers. In his role as the leader of the kitchen, Steve gets the opportunity to display both his dedication to the church and the food. But in addition to displaying the importance of this food and his religion, Steve's experience shows how Lebanese culture and food is integral to the survival of the church. Steve's work in the kitchen can be seen as an effort to promote and protect his religious community and faith through use of his Lebanese identity. The fact that the leader of the kitchen is often a man also reflects a serious trend of Americanization, as the traditional gender roles described by Kevin Joseph earlier appear to be falling to the wayside. As we have seen, the Lebanese food sold at these fundraisers is critical to their success, and therefore the success of the church. In the space of Saint Joseph's kitchen, Steve Crate is able to blend the identities gained through his entrance into the Lebanese community of Waterville in order to share and promote both.

Returning to Tom Nale, who while a Catholic finds less of a connection between his faith and his ethnicity, we can find another interesting example of intermarriage within the community. Tom married within his faith, but outside of his community when he was wed to Donna, a member of Waterville's Franco-

American community. Recalling his wife's integration into the community, he again thanks God that she was able to cook with his mother before she passed. Like Steve, Donna's successful entrance into the community hinged on learning to cook Lebanese food the way her spouse's family taught her. Continuing the tradition set forth by his mother many decades prior, the Nale family often cooks together as a group when preparing Lebanese dishes. Jennifer Nale, Tom's youngest child and a current student at Colby College, explained to me the importance of food to her identity. You may recall Jennifer's anecdote about bringing kibbee to school, encompassing the moment when she realized that not everyone's family cooks and eats the same food as her own. When she thinks about her Lebanese identity she immediately sees images her grandmother's kitchen, recalling the smells and tastes of her grandmother's dishes and the feel of flattening dough with her famous rolling pin. Today she continues to foster this identity on a weekly basis, returning home to cook and enjoy Lebanese cuisine with her father and mother. Even though she is only twenty-five percent Lebanese by blood, Jennifer insists that she thinks of her primarily identity as Lebanese, and she fosters this identity through connections with her family and their food.

During my interview with Tom Nale he presented me with the gift of Saint Joseph's Maronite Catholic Church Cookbook, however as he did so he made a telling comment. Handing me the cookbook, Tom explained, "You have to be a member of the Lebanese community to cook anything out of that cookbook." Sitting across from Tom at the desk in his office, I was initially unsure what to make of this comment. However, after investigating the history of this community and gaining a

better understanding of the supreme importance of food, I believe I understand what Tom is getting at. Obviously, given that one had the required time and resources (referring to ingredients, cooking supplies, etc.) to make the dishes found within this book, they would be able to prepare one of these dishes and would probably produce something tasty. However, what we can find in Tom's statement is proof of how important this food is to the identity and history of this community. Sure, anyone could make baked kibbee or a batch of zatar bread, but what makes this food truly Lebanese in Waterville is not what's in it, but who makes it. Furthermore, true Lebanese cuisine in Waterville does not gain its authenticity through use triple ground beef, large bags of flour, or grape leaves. Rather, the authenticity of this cuisine comes from the understanding of communal and family history displayed by those who prepare and consume it.

In eating beef kibbee today, members of the community are able to connect to and better understand a time when things were more difficult, celebrating their history through food. So when Tom says that one has to be Lebanese to cook the recipes found within the Saint Joseph's cookbook, he is really saying that this food becomes Lebanese when those who interact with it understand and appreciate the ways in which the food represents the Lebanese identity of the community. In Waterville, people become Lebanese through understanding the importance of food. Whether they're born in or marry in, a distinct Lebanese identity is formed around community member's connection to food, and therefore a connection to the history and experiences of this more than century-old Waterville community.