

'I Know I'm Home When I Have One:' The Cultural Significance of the Garbage Plate of Rochester, NY

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Abstract Located on Lake Ontario in western New York State, Rochester as a city is home to many local food traditions. One of these is the comfort food known as the Garbage Plate. A dish that is pervasive within the areas surrounding Rochester, the Garbage Plate has taken on social and cultural meanings in the everyday lives of Rochesterians. The dish can be seen both as a hybrid of Rochester foods as well as a hybrid of local culture. This paper looks at the history of the dish and its symbolic nature to the Rochester area. Attitudes towards the food from the perspective of Rochesterians were gathered from responses to an online survey as well as detailed online interview responses. Through these individual responses, it can be seen that Garbage Plates are not simply something to be eaten; rather, they evoke recollections of the past, memories of friends and family, and are associated with feelings of a sense of place.

Keywords: home, Garbage Plate, Rochester, food, consumption

Introduction

Regional foods are often an integral part of local cultural identity. Upstate New York is home to several culinary traditions. Some of these regional dishes, like the Buffalo wing, have become popular throughout the rest of the United States and into other parts of the world. Other aspects of the local food culture have not spread beyond the confines of the region. Though these foods have a rich history within the area, their importance has not transcended place. Instead these dishes have become firmly embedded within the local communities, maintaining a sense of importance and pride with those who call Upstate New York home.

One of these dishes is a favorite to Rochester, New York and the area surrounding the city in Monroe County, New York (Figure 1) — the Garbage Plate. This conglomeration of traditional comfort foods, only found in locally owned restaurants throughout the greater Rochester area, represents many of the homegrown culinary traditions by combining products specifically made in Rochester onto one plate. The dish coincidentally mixed several foods considered

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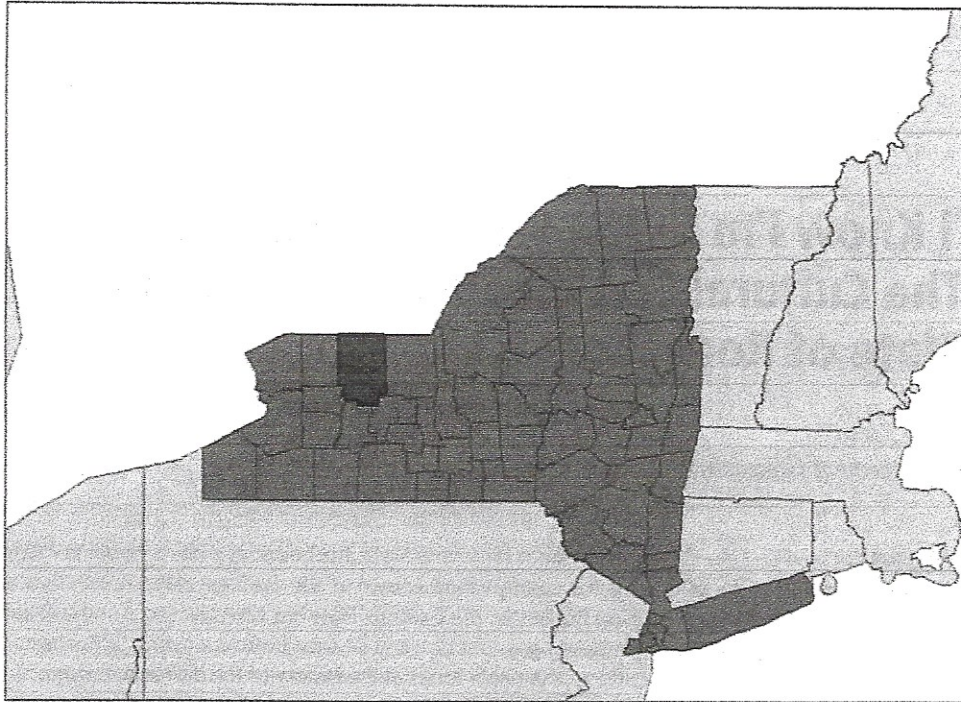


Figure 1. Monroe County, NY USA. Map produced by the author.

to be iconic to Rochester. In this sense, the Garbage Plate is a hybrid of Rochester food, because in order to be made it must utilize a variety of foodstuffs that originated in that city.

Not only is the Garbage Plate representative of local foods, but it is also a visible representation of the culture of Rochester. People in the area take pride in this dish, often seeing it as a representation of comfort, home, family, and friends. The Garbage Plate is not only a food to showcase Rochester cuisine, but also representative of surrounding oneself with family and friends, having fun, and being proud to call Rochester home.

This paper will explore the origins and geographic availability of the Garbage Plate in the Rochester area. As such, part of the paper will present a culinary history of the dish in order to explain each component and why the plate itself is a hybrid of local food traditions. As a former resident of the Rochester metropolitan area and someone who grew up in Rochester some of this information will be autoethnographic. Having now lived outside of Rochester and New York State for close to ten years, I have not yet found many dishes with such a rooted cultural embeddedness as the Garbage Plate. Often the only way to get information about particular aspects of material culture is from personal observations, in this case, of local food establishments. The paper will also look at the cultural contexts of the Garbage Plate through analysis of results of an online survey about the dish as well as responses to email interviews with a select group of survey participants. Though my parents moved to Rochester from Detroit, Michigan, I lived in Rochester for twenty years and frequently visit the city whenever I can. In that time I have

eaten my fair share of Garbage Plates from various eating establishments and have found that the responses of the people I interviewed reflect many of my own feelings about the food and the city itself. Through the historical, cultural, and social contexts, in addition to a review of scholarly literature on food, culture, and home, the paper will demonstrate how food is more than something to be eaten. Certain dishes can embody not only culinary traditions but culture, comfort, sense of place, and the idea of home.

Setting: Industry and Innovation

Rochester, NY is an industrial city on the fringes of Lake Ontario and the United States Rust Belt. Established as a flourmill town on the Genesee River in the early nineteenth century, it quickly became one of the first 'boomtowns' in the United States helped by the growth of the Erie Canal. As farming shifted further west, Rochester became a city of manufacturing and entrepreneurship with the establishment of companies such as Eastman Kodak and Bausch and Lomb. Throughout the twentieth century Rochester continued to develop as a blue collar, working class city with Kodak, Xerox, and Bausch and Lomb leading the industrial sector. The presence of these corporations as well as large universities such as the University of Rochester and Rochester Institute of Technology also allowed the city to become a center for innovation (City of Rochester 2013). However, with the recent bankruptcy of Eastman Kodak and industrial decline of parts of the city, Rochester has suffered from an identity crisis similar to other Rust Belt areas. In light of this trend, Rochesterians identify the Garbage Plate as something that is unique to the city that people can continue to take pride in and claim as their own.

Academic Trends in Food Consumption, Sense of Place, and the Home

Consumption has become a popular subject in several disciplines due to the 'cultural turn' of the previous two decades. The scope of consumption studies is widely varied from a focus on economic perspectives of commodity chains to cultural interpretations of self-identity and material goods (see Kneale and Dwyer 2003 or Crang and Jackson 2001 for overviews of consumption studies). Rather than simply contrasting consumption with production, however, academics have asserted that on its own "consumption is a meaningful activity which helps us create social identities and relationships with others; as we do this the things we consume are given human values" (Kneale and Dwyer 2003, 300). Consuming material goods is used as a way to identify social status, create meaning among the seemingly banal, and ultimately express who we are as humans.

One of the issues consumption research has recently explored is that of food studies. Bell and Valentine declare "food has long ceased to be merely about sustenance and nutrition. It is packed with social, cultural and symbolic meanings" (2013, 3). They continue to emphasize the link between consumption, identity, and food "in a world in which self-identity and place identity are woven

through webs of consumption, what we eat (and where, and why) signals...who we are" (Bell and Valentine 2013, 3). The foods that people choose to eat are often self-proclamations of cultural identity, metaphors for other aspects of culture or society. As Bell and Valentine (2013) further remark, food consumption also marks different passages of time (through seasonal offerings), distinct parts of a person's life course, and specific traditions with family and friends. Consuming food is not simply about the physical act of eating, but rather about performing identity, culture, and social relations.

Food is being increasingly used as a statement of identity as people have begun to take on a greater sense of neo-localism in an ever more globalized world (Shorridge and Shorridge 1998). People seeking feelings of attachment to their own communities often use regional foods to solidify their connection to specific places. Indeed the growth in studying food tourism has led to a greater understanding of food as symbolic and representative of specific locations and destinations (Du Rand and Heath 2006; Molz 2007; Everett and Aitchison 2008; Sims 2009). Within the United States, for example, foods, such as the lobster in Maine, have come to be associated with specific places as destination fare, taking on contested identities of their own in the process (Lewis 1998).

Despite studies on food as indicative of place much research on food consumption has focused on the place where food is most often consumed, in the home (Valentine 1999). The concept of home, however, has also been under much academic scrutiny. Long considered a nurturing, safe, and private location (Tuan 2004), the home is now seen by some as a more precarious site of emotional highs and lows, of comfort and violence, and of memory and longing (Duncan and Lambert 2003). Blunt (2005, 506) sums up the concept of home as "a material and an affective space, shaped by everyday practices, lived experiences, social relations, memories and emotions." The home, Blunt and Varley (2004, 3) contend,

'invoke[s] a sense of place, belonging or alienation that is intimately tied to a sense of self. Rather than view the home as a fixed, bounded and confining location, geographies of home traverse scales from the domestic to the global in both material and symbolic ways. The everyday practices, material cultures and social relations that shape home on a domestic scale resonate far beyond the household.'

Therefore, feelings invoked by the idea of home, those of comfort, nostalgia, belonging, family, friends, joy, and sadness, can be recreated by places and experiences far beyond the physical site of the home itself. Home is more than a residence. Rather, home is "inextricable from that of self, family, nation, sense of place, and sense of responsibility towards those who share one's place in the world" (Duncan and Lambert 2003, 395).

The home is only one of the settings often used to understand people's sense of place and belonging in the world. Geographers have long discussed the emotions and attachments people experience with regards to place. The 1970s in geography saw a flourishing of humanistic thought that focused on the idea of place, a specific

center of meaning or emotional attachment instead of an absolute location (Peet 1998). Emerging from the concept of place, Relph (1976) discussed the notion of an authentic sense of place as a feeling of belonging people possess with regards to a specific location, be it a home, city, region, or nation. This meaningful, and often subjective, connection with a place is an important part of people's identities. As such, people sometimes feel a strong sense of place to where they have lived or where they lived during their childhood (Cresswell 2004).

While Relph, among others, bemoaned the loss of a sense of place and growing placelessness in globalized and technologically advanced societies, recent research on place suggests otherwise. Massey (2005) argues for a growing global sense of place as more space-time events are being connected in increasing ways in people's everyday lives. For Massey, place is not only an emotional connection to location, but also a weaving together of stories through time and space that represent the here and now of a location. Having a sense of place involves embedding meaning into a location based on the social and spatial position of a particular individual in a particular time (Mitchell 2000). The material culture of a location, including the types of foods consumed, play an important role in delimiting identity, sense of place, and belonging (Shortridge and Shortridge 1998).

It is my intention through this paper to demonstrate how the consumption of certain foods, specifically the Garbage Plate in Rochester, can be a cultural and social activity tied to notions of sense of place and home. Food is more than simply a material good, but rather a hybrid of symbolic meaning. Specific types of food can serve as a cultural reminder of childhood attachments to place, memories of family and friends, and the production of identities associated with place. Through eating, people strengthen their own place connections and social identities, reinforcing their sense of place.

The Plate with All the Garbage on it: Constructing a Hybrid Dish

The Garbage Plate is a dish found widely throughout Rochester and the surrounding areas. As such, it can easily be classified as a regional food that locals are all aware of, but one that is not widely known outside of the immediate area. Though today's variety of Garbage Plates contain new options for consumers to enjoy, the variations all acknowledge the origins of the dish by continuing to offer a traditional version of the plate. The dish is hybrid in the sense that it takes locally made hot dogs as well as a hot sauce variation not found anywhere else and combines these into one dish commonly available in the areas surrounding Rochester, New York. While the Garbage Plate has become a staple on the menu of many local greasy spoon restaurants, the dish has distinct origins at Nick Tahou's Restaurant in downtown Rochester.

The Garbage Plate is a hybrid of local Rochester cuisine mixed with familiar picnic foods typically piled high on a flimsy paper plate. Traditionally, the Garbage Plate features three separate layers of food. The first layer consists of a heap of home fries (cubed potatoes that are fried and crispy) and a pile of macaroni salad

(cooked elbow noodles covered in mayonnaise and spices with a few pieces of celery and carrots mixed in). The second layer is the customer's choice of meat, either two hamburger or cheeseburger patties or two hot dogs, affectionately called "hots" by Rochesterians. Hot dogs have a unique place in the Rochester food scene. Their importance is evidenced by the large number of local establishments with the word "hots" in their name. Within the city of Rochester and throughout the surrounding suburbs, there is at least one "hots" restaurant in every town. The names vary from the name of the town that they are in (Irondequoit Hots, Webster Hots, Fairport Hots, Henrietta Hots, Penfield Hots, Greece Hots) to the street that they are built on (Empire Hots, Monroe Hots) to the names of people who own them (Mark's Texas Hots, Steve T's Hots and Potatoes, Jimmy Z's Texas Hots) and the list goes on.

There is one specific type of hot dog that stands out in Rochester, the Zweigle's brand "white hot." When ordering a hot dog at a restaurant, patrons must specify whether they would like a white hot or a red hot. A red hot is a typical hot dog much like what is found elsewhere in the United States with the exception of being cooked in a casing that pops open when grilled. Red hots can be all beef or a combination of beef and pork, but their defining characteristic is that they are the color red. A white hot is a hot dog, but it is made with a combination of pork, water, beef, veal, dry milk, and spices. Most importantly it is not typically smoked like red hots.

The white hot was created by the Zweigle's hotdog company in Rochester. Zweigle's, started in 1880 by Wilhelm Zweigle and his wife Josephine. It is now in its fourth and fifth generation of family ownership and still located in Rochester. A producer of deli meats and sausages, Zweigle's came out with its famous and unique product, the white hot, in 1925 (www.zweigles.com). White hots are offered everywhere that red hots are because "the people in Rochester, New York now take pride in knowing the exclusivity of this product" (www.zweigles.com).

The love for Zweigle's hot dogs in upstate New York is evidenced by the fact that Zweigle's hots are the official hot dog of the Buffalo Sabres hockey team and the Rochester Americans (farm hockey team to the Buffalo Sabres). Zweigle's are also served at several universities such as Cornell University, Rochester Institute of Technology, and the University of Rochester. Zweigle's has also started to sell their product online and will ship them anywhere in the United States. Though there are other companies who have started to make their own version of the white hot, as Schleede and Rezsnyak of City Newspaper say, "Rochesterians are fiercely devoted to their white hots, and if it's not Zweigle's it doesn't matter" (Schleede and Rezsnyak 2009, 6). The traditional Garbage Plate originally offered Zweigle's hot dogs as the only meat option on the dish.

The final layer of the Garbage Plate consists of condiments, specifically Rochester-style hot sauce, chopped onions, and mustard. Patrons will often add other condiments as well like ketchup, traditional hot sauce (such as Frank's Red Hot Sauce), or salt and pepper. Rochester-style hot sauce must be singled out as uniquely different than any other type of hot pepper sauce found in the United

States. Asking for hot sauce on a hot dog or hamburger in Rochester will yield another unique Rochester food. According to Susie Hume at City Newspaper, one of the five local dishes every Rochesterian should try is Rochester-style hot sauce. Resembling Cincinnati chili, Rochester-style hot sauce is “more of a runny chili than a traditional hot sauce, the local version features finely ground beef and – often off-putting to first-timers – cinnamon” (Hume 2008, 1). The ground beef in the sauce is ground super fine into small granules. The sauce slightly resembles the amount of meat and grease one would scrape off of a grill at the end of work shift at a burger restaurant. Rochester hot sauce is a greasy combination of spices, water, and trace amounts of ground beef.

Each local establishment that carries a meat hot sauce in Rochester will make their own variation of it, adding different spices for distinct flavor. The most common place to find Rochester hot sauce is Bill Gray’s restaurant. Bill Gray’s, a local chain hamburger joint that started in 1938 and claims the “World’s Greatest Cheeseburger,” adds a special ingredient to their version of Rochester hot sauce — turnips (Bill Gray’s 2008, Hume 2008). Not much is known about the origins of this specialty sauce. There is no doubt, however, that it is popular. Bill Gray’s bottles their hot sauce and sells it in local grocery stores. In 2007, another variety of meat hot sauce hit the shelves: Steve T’s Secret Sauce, which Steve T had been concocting and selling in his restaurant, Steve T’s Hots and Potatoes, since 1964 (Mitner 2007, New York Style Deli 2009). This local sauce is liberally ladled over every version of the Garbage Plate in every establishment where the dish can be purchased unless otherwise specified.

The garbage plate is then served with a slice of French bread and butter. It is often said that the “purpose of the bread is to soak up the grease left after you’ve eaten the garbage plate” (RocWiki 2010). Others claim that the dish is usually served on a paper plate so that the plate will soak up the grease. Either way, the Garbage Plate is a daunting pile of food and one that can combine all of the unique flavors of Rochester onto one plate (Figure 2). Its hybridity as a culinary creation exists in the fact that the flavor can only be replicated through the use of foods local to Rochester.

How to Find a Garbage Plate

The Garbage Plate has been thoroughly embedded in Rochester culture and is served at a variety of restaurants around the Rochester area. In fact, as Hume says, “it could even be argued that you can’t be a real Rochester dining establishment if you don’t offer your own take on the ‘plate’” (Hume 2008). Though garbage plates are available at any restaurant with the word “Hots” in its name or at a variety of other local establishments, the original Garbage Plate was created at Nick Tahou’s restaurant. The restaurant, located in the former Rochester terminal of the Buffalo, Rochester, and Pittsburgh railway was founded in 1918 and operated by Nick Tahou himself for over fifty years. The earliest version of a garbage plate dates back to the restaurant’s opening.

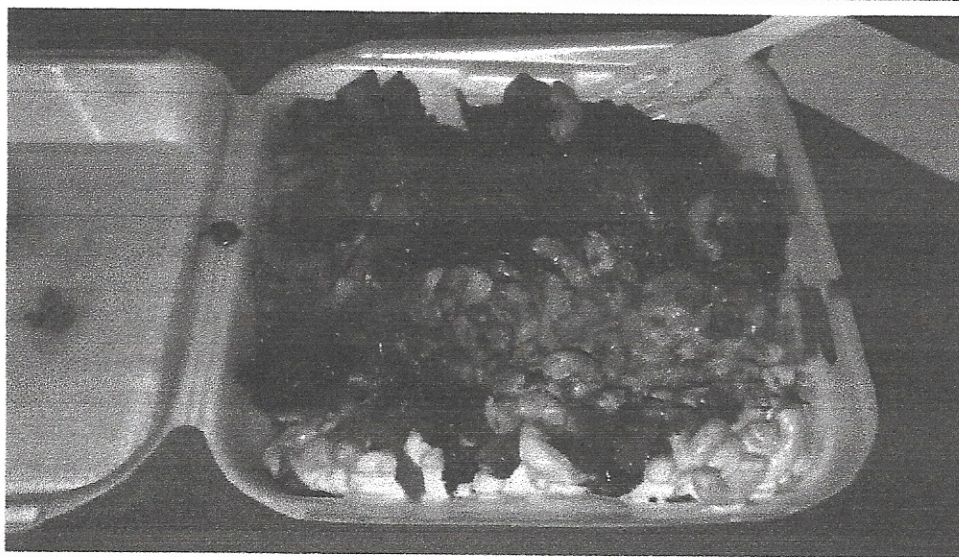
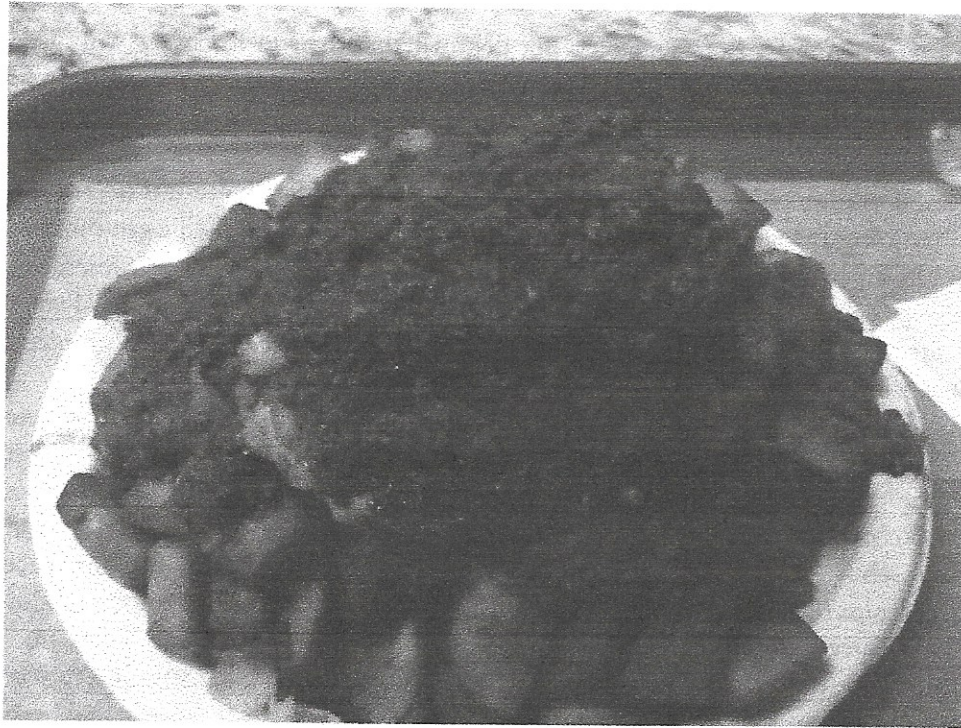


Figure 2. Two different variations of the Garbage Plate. The bottom photo is packaged for take out and not on the typical paper plate, demonstrating the availability of late night delivery services for Garbage Plates. Photos by Kevin Freese and Bob Fekete.

Originally called Hots and Potatoes (or Hots and Po-tors) it was a plate piled with fried potatoes, baked beans, hot dogs, onions, mustard, and Rochester style hot sauce. The original plate also used Zweigle's brand hot dogs. Today however, Tahou's uses its own brand of red and white hot dogs for their Garbage Plate. Later, the dish changed its name to the Garbage Plate when local college students started asking for the plate with "all the garbage on it" (Mitzewich 2010). Since then Nick

Tahou and his Garbage Plate have become local legends in the Rochester area. When Tahou passed away in 1997, people across the city honored him by eating Garbage Plates. Some locals even leave Garbage Plates at his gravesite to honor him.

Today Nick's son, Alex Tahou runs his restaurant (Alexander 2007). An official Garbage Plate can only be purchased at Nick Tahou's original location in downtown Rochester, as well as a new establishment that was opened in Henrietta (a Rochester suburb) in the summer of 2010. The Garbage Plate is also available at local festivals such as the Rochester Lilac Festival and the New York State Fair (Nick Tahou's 2010), and variations of the dish are offered at the variety of local "Hots" establishments in the Rochester area. In 1992, Nick Tahou officially trademarked both the name "Garbage Plate" and "Nick Tahou" (RocWiki 2010). Because people are legally prevented from calling their version of Tahou's Garbage Plate by that name, local establishments have come up with a variety of different names to call this dish. Names vary from the trash plate, sloppy plate, compost pile, and messy plate to the junkyard plate, dumpster plate, 55 Junker plate, and the heartburn special (Alexander 2007; RocWiki 2010). The local chain restaurant Bill Gray's often names the two plates they serve after the various local high school sports teams in the towns where there is a Bill Gray's franchise.

Though the basic recipe is the same for every variety of plate, the toppings have expanded greatly from the original hamburger or hot dog choice. "Plates" are now topped with hamburger, cheeseburger, red hot, white hot, grilled cheese sandwich, grilled chicken breast, chicken fingers, fish, veggie burgers, or even fried eggs (Mitzewich 2010). A local upscale restaurant, Horizons at the Lodge at Woodcliff, has even created its own version called the Plat de Refuse. For \$15.75 you can dine on a plate loaded with homemade beans, macaroni salad with grape tomatoes, and either an elk burger with Vermont cheddar or a bison hot dog, all topped with a wild game chili hot sauce (RocWiki 2010).

"Wanna Get a 'Plate' Tonight?": Social and Cultural Contexts of Garbage Plates

Eating a version of a Garbage Plate has become a rite of passage for young people growing up in the Rochester area and those who have just moved to Rochester from another part of the United States. Many people believe that "you are not truly a Rochesterian until you've consumed one" (Schleede and Rezsnyak 2009, 4). Because the Garbage Plate has become such a social icon in the Rochester area, it is easy to find people who are willing to share their experiences about the dish. I conducted an online survey and email interviews with people living in the Rochester area. The purpose of the survey was to ask people basic questions about their Garbage Plate eating habits and to find additional people who would be willing to answer more detailed open interview style questions. Because I am from the Rochester area, I was able to use Facebook to gather survey participants. By posting the survey to my Rochester networks and asking people to share the post with their Rochester friends I was able to reach 199 people in only five days and ask them to take the survey.

In administering the survey through Facebook, it is not surprising that many of the survey respondents were younger than age thirty. Of those who responded to the question on age, twenty-five people said that they were twenty years old or younger, sixty-five people said that they were twenty-one to thirty years old, eight people said that they were thirty-one to fifty-five years old, and two people responded with fifty-five years or older. Therefore, the survey results likely reflect a younger generation. The online surveys were administered through Survey Monkey and I received a total of eighty-nine complete responses (twenty-one responses were thrown out for being incomplete). I asked those who responded to the survey to contact me directly if they would be willing to complete an interview. Fifteen people expressed interest in taking the email survey. The interview respondents were not as skewed towards the younger age cohorts. Of the fifteen interviewees, none were younger than twenty, six were between the ages of twenty-one and thirty, eight were aged between thirty-one and fifty-five, and one was older than fifty-five. The interview responses reflect the views of a slightly older demographic than the survey. Each interviewee provided me with their own pseudonym to use when recording their responses. A draft of the final paper was offered to those who participated in either the survey or the interview process.

Garbage Plates as Rochester Icon

It became obvious through the interviews that those responding to the questions considered the Garbage Plate to be an iconic food in Rochester. When asked if the dish should be considered an iconic food, Blob, a 23-year-old male who grew up in Rochester replied, "Absolutely. It's one of the few truly 'Rochester' things." Similarly, a 30-year-old woman who moved to Rochester when she was a young child, Robyn responded, "Absolutely, it's something that we're known for that is pretty unique to Rochester and everyone here knows what a plate is."

Several other reactions included reference to the Garbage Plate being iconic because of its uniqueness and connection to Rochester. "Yes I consider it iconic because it has become part of the culture here and most people know about it and that it is a Rochester food," commented Ignatius, a 27-year-old male from the Rochester area. Similarly the food is iconic "because if you ask people what food do you think of when you think of Rochester, almost always Garbage Plates are mentioned," claimed Fred, a 50-year-old male who was not born in Rochester. Skeletor, a 25-year-old male who also did not grow up in Rochester shared Fred's sentiments:

I do consider the garbage plate a significant part of Rochester, yes iconic, because it is food that only happens in that way in Rochester; additionally, anyone who has been to Nick Tahou's Hots know's what's up, that's Rochester.

As a woman who also did not grow up in Rochester, 54-year-old Eliza summed up the uniqueness of the dish by saying it is "totally Rochester." There were no

responses to the interview questions that indicated that the Garbage Plate should not be considered an iconic food for the area.

Zweigles hot dogs were also mentioned by almost all of the interviewees as being an important food to Rochester with some people even mentioning the link between garbage plates and the famous hot dogs. Eleven of the fifteen people interviewed mentioned Zweigles or white hots specifically as another type of iconic Rochester food. Ignatius commented that “maybe Zweigles red hots also are iconic but not as strongly.” Another respondent, Megan, a 34-year-old female Rochester native said the “only other thing [type of local food] I can think of would be Zweigles.” Agreeing with Megan, a 34-year-old man, Matt mentioned the connection between the hot dog and the dish. “The other iconic food from Rochester is a main ingredient in a Garbage Plate: The Zweigle’s hot-dog — in particular, a white hot.” One respondent, Nancy a 50-year-old female who grew up in the area, mentioned Rochester style hot sauce as an iconic food: “For one, hot sauce is different in other places. We have “meat sauce” and others just have versions of stuff like wing sauce.” Other foods that were mentioned that do not correspond specifically to the Garbage Plate as being iconic to the Rochester area were Genesee beer, specifically Genesee Cream Ale, and Abbott’s Frozen Custard.

The fact that the Garbage Plate is considered to be an icon by interview respondents seems to say something about the city of Rochester itself, echoing Bell’s and Valentine’s (2013) arguments about the fusion of food and place identities. Many interviewees mentioned the blue-collar nature of the city and the dish as representative of that. Though not having grown up in the Rochester area, a 54-year-old man who identified himself as The Last Film Guy said the Garbage Plate shows that Rochester “was a working man’s town and this [the Garbage Plate] is working man’s food.” Matt agreed that the dish showed “that Rochester is a working-class city.” Alvin, a 26-year-old male from the area shared similar sentiments about the importance of a good meal to the working class in Rochester “I also think plates are a great example of how food is treated in Rochester. Not a lot of thought is given to how healthy something is; food in Rochester needs to be good and filling.” The Garbage Plate appears to be a metaphor for some Rochesterians for the industrial and hardworking roots of the city.

Several interviewees seemed to think that the Garbage Plate was representative of the nature of the people in the city as well, as culturally creative. Megan said the dish shows how Rochester is a “fun, young and creative place.” For Susan, a 56-year-old female who grew up in Rochester, the dish showed “That we can be leaders in food and not followers. It says we have great taste.” Additionally, Nancy made similar claims saying how Garbage Plates show that Rochesterians “think outside of the box, tend to try different things.”

Garbage Plates and Social Gatherings

Aside from considering the Garbage Plate to be a staple among Rochester food culture and representative of the culture of the city, respondents to both the survey and the interviews were clear about the social importance of Garbage Plates in

Table 1. Survey Respondents (n = 89)

<i>Who do you eat with?</i>	
Parents	1
Siblings	5
Friends	74
Significant other	8
Alone	1
<i>What time of day?</i>	
Lunch (11 am - 4 pm)	7
Dinner (4 pm - 8 pm)	8
Late dinner (8 pm - 11 pm)	27
Late night (11 pm - 3 am)	47
<i>How often do you eat a Garbage Plate?</i>	
More than once a week	0
A few times a month	16
Once every few months	50
Once a year	15
Less than once a year	8

their everyday lives. As Kneale and Dwyer (2003) pointed out, certain types of consumption become tied explicitly to identity. The significance of eating Garbage Plates in a social setting relates back to identity creation among Rochesterians. Almost all of the survey respondents indicated that they were most likely to enjoy eating Garbage Plates in the company of others. Most people who answered the survey questions eat variations of the dish either for a late dinner or very late at night, with the majority of respondents eating them after 11:00 p.m. (See Table 1.) One anonymous survey respondent, when providing an answer to where the best place to get a Garbage Plate would be, confirmed the late night eating habits of his acquaintances by saying that the best place to get a garbage plate is a place that “you can walk to, because you’re probably drunk if you want a garbage plate.” Some establishments will deliver the plate to your house until 3 a.m. Despite the fact that survey respondents often seem to eat Garbage Plates after a night on the town, most of the people who took the survey only consume a plate once every few months. No one who answered the survey questions said that they eat a plate more than once a week. It seems that, at least for survey participants, people prefer to eat the dish less frequently than other foods, however they also usually do eat them at least once a year with only eight people saying that they eat them less than once a year. The frequency of consumption could be a reflection of the younger age demographic

for the survey responses. For most people who took the survey, eating a Garbage Plate is a social activity that usually happens at night a few times a year. Ignatius commented on the frequency of eating this meal, "I have only probably had 10-20 realistically in my lifetime. I enjoy them as a novelty."

Interview responses further elaborated on these eating habits. Many respondents reminisced about the memories that they associate with the food. For Liz, a 47-year-old female from Rochester, her "memories of the garbage plate are linked to late nights partying in the city as a young woman and going to Nick's after clubbing. They are not all nice memories. Some are quite disgusting." However, to Liz Garbage Plates also "represent silly and happy memories of late night adventures downtown with friends." Fred holds similar feelings:

When I started getting Garbage Plates, I was much younger, in my 20s. It would always be at 2:00 am after an evening of bar hopping etc. and they really were good, but then again, anything probably would have been good at that point!

Ignatius points to the infrequency of eating Garbage Plates as the reason why they are so special.

[Garbage Plates] remind me of times spent with friends eating them and the fact that it is something special to Rochester causes me to reflect on past experiences having them with different people when I order one. I eat them infrequently enough that it is an occasion of sorts and almost always with company.

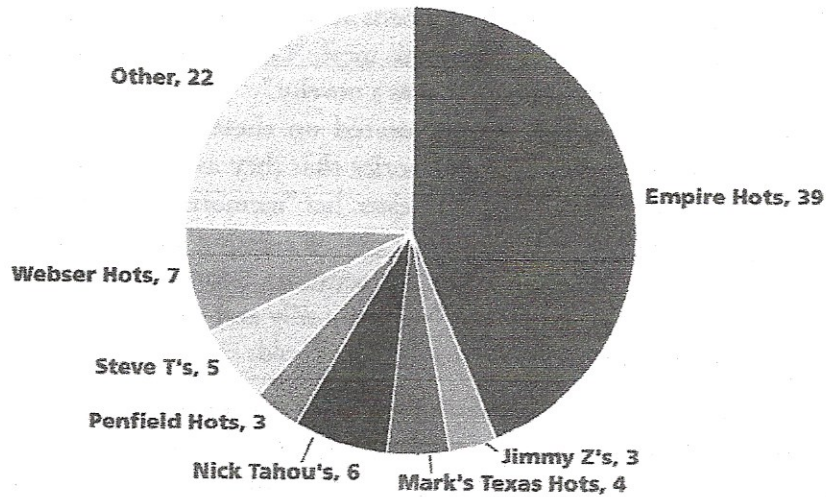
Since people do not eat these on a regular basis, the Last Film Guy confirms that "getting [a Plate] always seems to be a special occasion."

Friends and drinking are specifically mentioned as common times when interviewees find themselves eating Garbage Plates. Mander23, a 25-year-old female from Rochester replied that:

just about every time you suggest to a group of friends to go get one, the answer is a resounding yes... they bring together good friends and good times. I can remember almost every time I've eaten a Plate because it was always with friends/family and it was always before, during, or after something really fun!!

Robyn, agreeing with the drinking associated with Garbage Plates, added her words of wisdom "We all know that garbage plates are the best food to eat after a long night of drinking to help combat a hangover." To Susan, Garbage Plates also represent "a great night out with friends after drinking." Garbage Plates have become symbolic for those people interviewed as a late night social activity for the area. The symbolism has become so ingrained that Nancy mentioned how miniature Garbage Plates are now often brought out during wedding receptions "like how people put out coffee and pastries at the end...my nephew had them at his wedding and it was a HUGE hit."

Where do people most often eat a Garbage Plate?



Where is the best place to eat a Garbage Plate?

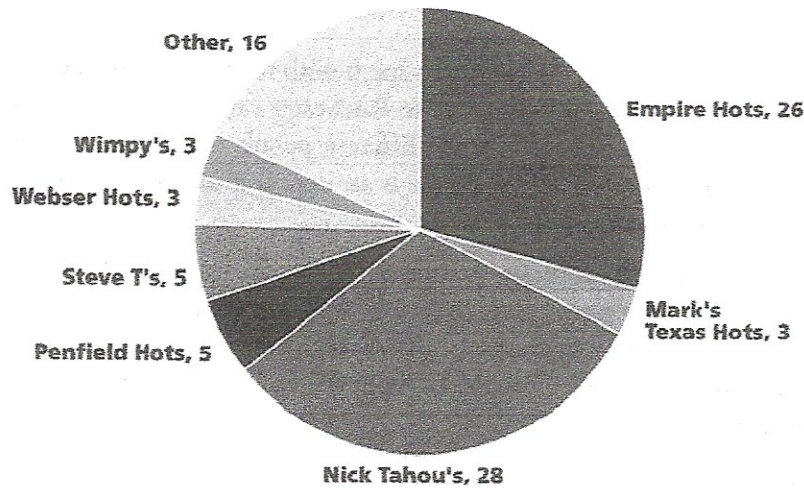


Figure 3. A restaurant was only listed by name if at least three people wrote it in for their response to the questions. The 'other' category contains various local 'hots' restaurants not mentioned by three or more people though one respondent wrote the Lilac Festival and another wrote that they make them at home for health reasons.

Several survey participants mentioned Nick Tahou's as having a special significance in their late night gatherings with friends. The survey confirmed that while many people do not go to Nick Tahou's most often for a Garbage Plate, they do consider the original version to be the best variation of the dish (see Figure 3). Jake, a 54-year-old male from Rochester, said the dish reminded him of "Nick Tahou's on Main St. Used to go all hours as a fire fighter." Though Nancy associated the dish as "something we do special with our family" she also said it reminded her of "Nick Tahou's-the old days when people used to go downtown for them." For Fred, having a Garbage Plate "brings back a flood of memories of

being with friends and how going to Nick Tahou's was how we ended an evening of fun. When I talk to some of those friends today, we still reminisce about those nights at Nick's." Nick Tahou's has become a location synonymous with ideas of the home as presented by Blunt and Varley (2004). The home as a place where social relations and emotions are developed certainly pertains to the feelings evoked by memories of being with family and friends at Nick Tahou's.

Though Garbage Plates represent friends and family to many of the interviewees, not all of these memories are of drunken fiascos. Megan shared a personal story of how Garbage Plates to her have taken on significance beyond late night partying:

it actually reminds me of my best friend in high school, Julie [name changed]. Julie was in a horrific car accident our senior year. As cheerleaders we would go to Empire Hots on the Thursday night before the Saturday football game with a few football players and have a plate. We named ourselves, FMC, "fat man club". Right after football season Julie was broad sided by another car and is now bounded to a wheelchair and has brain damage from the accident. Her boyfriend at the time, who also was on the football team and a member of the FML (lol) passed away a few years later in car accident. So, yes, strange as it may seem Garbage Plates have taken on a special meaning to me.

For participants in my survey and interviews the Garbage Plate is culturally embedded into their everyday lives and serves as a reminder of fun, friends, family, and sometimes even sadness.

Home, Sense of Place, and the Garbage Plate

Eating a Garbage Plate is more than a social activity. Not only does the dish represent Rochester food as well as Rochester urban culture, it also holds a special place in some people's minds that is associated with the idea of home and a sense of place. For Ignatius,

Part of the enjoyment is the nostalgia factor and the feeling that I am doing something special or unique to my city... I always thought it was kind of strange to have a food named after garbage because it seemed unappetizing but you get used to it and don't really think about it as being negative.

To Blob "People are fiercely loyal about which plates they find are the best and which ones they find are not up to snuff... I know I'm home when I have one, that's for sure." Alvin feels likewise. "Of course plates provide a 'homecoming' feel when I get one (since I live out of NY). Not only are they tasty and filling, but it reminds me of my younger years when I would hang out with friends." Mander23 agrees. "I don't know a single college student who studies out of state or away from Rochester that doesn't make it a priority to get a plate while they are home for visits and breaks." Mander23 also elaborated on the sense of hometown pride she believes the Garbage Plate represents:

Rochester is well known for several things, and most Rochesterians are extremely proud of those several things... Honestly, as cheesy as it sounds, I am super proud of the [Garbage] Plate. I believe it has a special meaning to many Rochesterians including myself. It is a comfort food that when you've been away from home, brings you right back to the place you grew up. I moved to Philly [Philadelphia, PA] and a restaurant there boasted "their version of the Rochester garbage plate" It looked awful, and quite honestly I wouldn't ever go near it. It's not from Rochester, it doesn't represent my home town, and I was almost offended that they took the idea. I think that most people who grow up in Rochester, even if they complain about [the city] ultimately love the place very much and are very proud. I think the [Garbage] Plate represents this.

Matt summed up his feelings about the dish by simply saying "it's home."

Hybrid Foods as Cultural Symbols of Place and Home

The area surrounding Rochester, NY is home to many local food varieties. Rochester has its own form of hot sauce, a distinct type of hot dog, and the pièce de résistance: the Garbage Plate. For many people, this cuisine defines upstate New York and the city of Rochester. Based on my survey and interviews, the garbage plate is a cultural icon that is eaten on a fairly regular basis by many people who live in the area. While the garbage plate originated at Nick Tahou's, it is most often consumed by my sample of survey respondents at one of many different locations throughout the Rochester area. However, Nick Tahou's Garbage Plate is still regarded by these participants as the best location to get this dish.

The consumption of Garbage Plates is about more than eating a relatively unhealthy plate of food. There are many Rochesterians, as shown by those who participated in the survey and interviews, who associate the dish with their personal identities, as well as the identity of the city of Rochester itself. Though survey respondents largely only consume the dish in late night social settings, the infrequency of having a plate allows for people to build an arsenal of specific memories attached to the occasions when they have had one. As Bell and Valentine (2013) remarked about food in general, eating Garbage Plates is about time: eating your first is a "rite of passage." The Plates mark out special occasions from other times spent with family or friends, and they allow people to relive certain memories and recall the past.

The dish itself invokes a sense of place among people who were interviewed. Respondents associated the food with the material culture of the geographical area surrounding Rochester, New York. Being comprised of several types of foods originating in the area, the Garbage Plate can easily be seen as an icon of local culture, a symbol of the area where people reside. Having such a dish easily creates a sense of identity and pride in the local, the type of neolocalism mentioned by Shortridge and Shortridge (1998). The food, for several interviewees, was also a reminder of the place where they grew up and spent their younger years. Reliving the experience of eating a Garbage Plate seems to reinforce their identity and sense

of place. Many people interviewed no longer live in the Rochester area. Returning to the city and eating a Garbage Plate is therefore seen as a homecoming, a way of reinforcing the roots of their identity as tied to a specific location. The experience of a Garbage Plate is not necessarily about eating the dish. For the people involved in this research, the act of eating is secondary to the remembrance of other time-spaces and the creation of new stories from where to establish place connections.

Being tied to the self and the city, Garbage Plates are also about home. They provide a sense of comfort to some people who are eating them. They invoke experiences of home life to many in terms of associations with family and friends. The dish brings symbolic meanings of the home outside of a residence and connects these ideas to the larger scale community and city. The Garbage Plate is regarded by my small sample of interviewees as something more than food. It is a physical manifestation of social identity and sense of place for someone from the Rochester area. While food is a basic tenant of survival, what people who have food options choose to eat says something about their sense of place. Garbage Plates provide a way for people to associate with the regional culture of Rochester, New York. As a place in transition, the Garbage Plate gives Rochesterians something unique that they can be proud of and claim as their own.

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