

THE ROTHSCHILDS CELEBRATE WATERLOO

As one of a number of festive events taking place tonight in support of Jewish historical preservation, what is more appropriate than a formal dinner commemorating the most remarkable family in modern Jewish history.

This unique “mishpocha” created immense wealth and applied it to living well and to dispensing unparalleled charitable benefactions. The Rothschilds were accepted in high society, yet never forgot or failed to celebrate their Jewish origin and identification. Its members endeavored to lead lives of satisfaction for themselves and for the benefit of the society of which they were a part and the tradition from which they sprang.

We have chosen to celebrate this extraordinary family with a composite dinner acknowledging their greatest single coup, Nathan Rothschild’s “scoop” on the Battle of Waterloo and the staggering windfall he scored as a result.

Beef Wellington, a dish created by the great chef Carême in honor of the battle’s hero, was the logical choice for the main course; its accompanying wine has long been identified with the family.

The preceding dish, Sole Montefiore, was a family favorite named after a Rothschild family connection. Its accompanying wine is identified with Prince von Metternich, a close family friend whose political successes dominated Europe in the first half of the 19th century.

The salad and cheese, also accompanied by a Rothschild wine, are in honor of Gutele, the family matriarch; the dessert, the classic Soufflé Rothschild, is paired with a present-day Rothschild sauterne.

The climax of the meal, an 1815 vintage famous as ‘The Waterloo Port,’ is accompanied by walnuts which were a favorite of the family’s founder.

Mayer Amschel Rothschild and his five dynamic sons had achieved wealth and fame long before 1815, primarily through their dealings on behalf of Prince William of Hesse, the sale of whose Hessian troops to the British in the American Revolution helped him become the richest ruler in Europe. And the Rothschilds’ financial services to the British government against Napoleon gave them yet more gold, influence and power. By 1815, the yellow and blue armbands of their private couriers, their private ships and even carrier pigeons, were recognized throughout Europe.

The results of Waterloo reached Nathan Rothschild even before they reached the British government. Leaning against his favorite pillar at the London Stock Exchange, he ostentatiously sold British government securities, creating a financial panic in the belief that Napoleon had won. When prices hit bottom, only minutes before the official news arrived, Rothschild repurchased a huge quantity for a song, carrying off the financial coup of the century. We can only assume that Nathan’s dinner that night was a festive one.

Carême, chef to Prince Talleyrand and later to the Rothschilds themselves, was preparing a feast in honor of Wellington when he heard that the victor of Waterloo would be delayed. The beef, already half-cooked, was hastily pulled off the fire. When the Duke finally arrived, Carême spread the partly-cooked beef with foie gras, covered it with pastry dough and popped it back into the oven, as we have done tonight.

The accompanying wine, (Chateau Mouton Rothschild 1982) is described by Robert Parker as one of the greatest wines he has ever tasted.

The first course, Sole Montefiore, is named for Sir Moses Montefiore, who, in 1812, married Judith Cohen, Nathan Rothschild’s sister-in-law. Nathan so promoted the young man’s career that he was able to retire in 1824 with a great fortune. Montefiore thereupon

spent the rest of his life aiding Jewish causes in Palestine and throughout the world. The accompanying Schloss Johannisberg 1989 is from Prince von Metternich's own vineyards.

Tonight's salad and cheese course is named for Gutele, Mayer Amshel's wife, the mother of five remarkable sons and herself a shrewd businesswoman. When she was in her early nineties and someone wished that she would live to 100 she replied, "Why should God take me at 100 when he can have me at 94?" The 1976 Chateau Lafite Rothschild accompanying this course is described by Parker as the best Lafite of the 1970's.

Accompanying the Soufflé Rothschild is Chateau Rieussec, a sauterne vineyard acquired by the Lafite Rothschilds in 1984. Parker calls the 1988 Rieussec a "winemaking tour de force."

Our final offering, the treasure of our cellar, the Waterloo Port, speaks for itself.

With the possible exception of the Fuggers in the Middle Ages and the Medicis in the Italian Renaissance, no family in recorded history has lived with such amplitude, with such a charitable record, and with such familial loyalty and mutual support as the Rothschilds.

Professional activity, family and charity have been their common vocation for 200 years; and one could do worse! We are confident they would smile on Eldridge Street.

*Dinner for the Eldridge St. Project
April 28, 1993*