

# History of Tofu

Compiled by William Shurtleff of Soyfoods Center.

Tofu: A 2,000-year old health food miracle



In 220 A.D. archeologists find a depiction of the preparation of soymilk and tofu, suggesting that they were being made in northern China during the Eastern/Later Han Period (A.D. 22-220).

In Japan, the first mention of tofu was



in 1183 in the diary of Hiroshige Nakaomi, a Shinto priest of the shrine at Nara; tofu was used as an offering at the shrine's altar. However, it wasn't until 1489 that the current characters used today for the word "tofu" were first written in Japan.

In 1603 "tofu" makes its first appearance in a European-language document, *Vocabulario do lingoa de lapam...* [Vocabulary of the language of Japan], the earliest dictionary of the Japanese language compiled by Jesuits living in Nagasaki, Japan.

A more detailed description of tofu by a Westerner was in 1665 by Domingo Fernandez de Navarrete, in his book *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*. Navarrete, who served as a Dominican missionary in China, wrote about tofu "... the most usual, common and cheap sort of food all China abounds in, and which all men in that empire eat, from the emperor to the meanest Chinese..."

The earliest known reference to tofu by an American wasn't until 1770. It appears in a letter written by the famous Benjamin Franklin in London to John Bartram in Philadelphia. He sent Bartram some soybeans— which he called "Chinese cara-



vances".

In the 1800s, Chinese immigrants were coming to the United States to work and "make their fortune." The first tofu manufacturer in America, Wo Sing & Co., was founded in 1878 in San Francisco to serve this growing market. They were followed by Hirata & Co. (1895) in Sacramento, California, the earliest known Japanese-American company and Quong Hop & Co. (1896), the oldest existing tofu maker in America today.

The two oldest existing Japanese-American tofu companies (House Foods & Yamauchi Inc. of Los Angeles and Aala Tofu Co. of Honolulu) began as H. Iwanaga Daufu in Hawaii in 1923. In 1926 the company was renamed Shoshiro Kanehori Tofu, and again in 1937 as Haruko Uyeda Tofu, still at the same address. About 1939 the company was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Shokin Yamauchi, who later renamed it Aala Tofu Co. Their son, Shoan Yamauchi, made tofu at the family company until 1946, when he went to Los Angeles, purchased the Hinode Tofu Co., and began making tofu there in 1947. After becoming Matsuda-Hinode Tofu Co. in 1963, the company was renamed House Foods & Yamauchi Inc. in 1983.

Tofu production was concurrently taking place on the European continent. Although Paillieux of France, in 1880, was the first to make tofu, Caséo-Sojaïne, founded by Li Yu-ying, a Chinese citizen, biologist and engineer, was the first commercial scale manufacturer. Established in May 1911 at a site, a few miles northwest of Paris, the company was making and selling tofu.

Back in America, non-Asians also took up the craft of tofu making. In 1929 T.A. Van Gundy, a Seventh-Day Adventist and founder of La Sierra Industries in Arlington, California, became the first Westerner to make tofu commercially when he introduced La Sierra Soya Cheese. This

tofu was canned and pimento was added to prevent the tofu from graying after canning.

Even with decades of tofu production in the U.S., it wasn't until 1958 that tofu was first sold in a U.S. supermarket. Boys Market supermarket chain— which had about 12 stores at the time in Los Angeles— was the pioneer. Made by Matsuda Hinode Tofu Co., the tofu was sold in individual packages.

Tofu not only became a part of the American diet, it became the subject of books, too. The Library of Congress established in 1965 the subject heading "Tofu" as the official name for that food in cataloging books for libraries across America.

The *Book of Tofu*, by Shurtleff and Aoyagi, played a major role in introducing tofu to the Western World. Published by Autumn Press in 1975, this book has sold about 550,000 copies to date.

1996 - The Little Tokyo Service Center hosts the 1st LA Tofu Festival, attracting over 10,000 people.



Source: <http://www.tofufest.org/tofuindex/tofufest/main/index.html>

Where to buy Freshly Made Soy Bean Products in Town

You can now pick up freshly made soy bean products at Viet Huong Restaurant located at 1672 N. Goldenrod Rd (corner of E. Colonial Dr., across from Sam's club). Be there early as the quantity is limited to guarantee freshness. It is usually sold out by the late afternoon. Call ahead at 407-277-3321 to check the availability.