

# Oscar's Worthy Performance

FOR 50 YEARS, "OSCAR OF THE WALDORF" WAS THE LANDMARK HOTEL'S LIVING EMBODIMENT

BY JILL OSET CAHILL

DID YOU EVER WONDER how "Waldorf Salad," "Veal Oscar," and "Thousand Island" salad dressing came to be named? Their origins can be attributed to New York City's Waldorf-Astoria Hotel and its legendary maitre d'hotel, Oscar Michel Tschirsky.

Known as "Oscar of the Waldorf," he was the "official Host of the Waldorf" (both the original building at 34th street and Fifth Avenue and its present location, at 50th Street and Park Avenue) from 1893 to 1913.

To all he greeted and served, Oscar of the Waldorf was more than an employee; his personality embodied the spirit of the magnificence of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, often considered the "unofficial palace of New York." His reputation was so well-known, that, for many, it was considered a privilege to meet him. On one occasion, Oscar was introduced to one of the most important railroad men of the time, who later said, "I had rather meet that man than nine out of 10 of your so-called big men either here or in Washington."



"OSCAR OF THE WALDORF," OSCAR TSCHIRSKY, THE LEGENDARY MAITRE D'HOTEL OF THE WALDORF-ASTORIA IN NEW YORK CITY, ESCORTS MRS. HERBERT HOOVER DOWN THE STEPS OF THE LEGENDARY HOTEL.

Born in Switzerland near the end of the American Civil War, Oscar Tschirsky came to America on the recommendation of his older brother. After working at various New York hotels and restaurants, he applied for a position at the Waldorf Hotel three years before it was to open. He learned that William Waldorf Astor was building a hotel and thought it might present a good employment opportunity. When it was requested that he provide letters of personal recommendation, Oscar impressed hotel management with more than eight pages of signatures affixed to a testimonial. Thus, he became the first employee hired at the Waldorf.

A head waiter by the age of 36, Tschirsky became maitre d'hotel in two years time, working closely with hotel manager, George C. Boldt. With vision, efficiency, and the desire to run the largest fine

hotel in the world, the two men essentially operated the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel for about two decades near the turn of century. Often vacationing with Boldt and his wife in the Thousand Islands region of the St. Lawrence River in New York, Oscar reportedly created the now famous salad dressing named for this area.

Tschirsky once wrote that his best memories of his Waldorf years were reflected in his collection of 2,000 menus that he felt embodied a 15-year history of the Waldorf-Astoria, New York society, and American cuisine from the turn of the century, through the New Deal age. For their 50th wedding anniversary, Oscar and his wife celebrated at the hotel with Mayor LaGuardia and messages from the President of the United States and his cabinet. Needless to say, Waldorf Salad was served. ■

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