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How 7 Summer Barbecue Staples Got Their Names

by [Ethan Trex](#) - July 1, 2010 - 3:35 PM

If you're lucky, you'll get to spend at least part of the holiday weekend firing up a grill and enjoying some tasty treats. Have you ever wondered where our backyard barbecue favorites got their names, though? Was the Oscar Meyer from the hot dog package a real guy or a clever marketing invention? Let's take a look at a few etymologies and histories behind the food on your (paper) plate.

1. Hamburger



Hamburger takes its name from the German city of Hamburg. A dish of salted chopped beef was popular with the residents of the port city, and when Hamburg's residents—who are known as Hamburgers—began to immigrate to the United States during the 18th and 19th centuries, they brought the Hamburg steak concoction with them.

Delmonico's steakhouse in New York City claims to have served the first American version of the hamburger steak during the 1830s, while Louis' Lunch in New Haven boasts that it served the first hamburger sandwich to a rushed patron in 1900.

2. Hot Dogs

The etymology of the name "hot dog" is every bit as mysterious as the meat that's actually in the sausage casing. A popular explanation tells a story of newspaper cartoonist Tad Dorgan seeing vendors at New York's Polo Grounds selling sausages to baseball fans and labeling them "hot dogs" in a 1901 cartoon.

The only problem with that story is that the term "hot dog" was around well before 1901. The *Yale Record* had published a story in 1895 that included a poem about the hot dogs sold by campus food trucks, and the slang usage of "hot dog" for someone prone to showing off dates to about the same era.

In all likelihood, the name arose from accusations that sausage makers filled out their wares with dog meat; these claims date back at least as far as 1845. Thanks to these accusations, by the late 19th century "dogs" had become slang for the inexpensive sausages cash-strapped college students could pick up from vendors near their schools.

The names "wiener" and "frankfurter" come from the presence of similar sausages in Vienna, Austria—which is *Wien* in German—and Frankfurt, Germany.

3. Bratwurst

The popular sausages are taken from the German *brat* for "finely chopped meat" and *wurst* for "sausage."

4. Flat Iron Steak



This trendy, tasty cut is a fairly recent development. In the early 2000s, meat science professors at the University of Nebraska and the University of Florida searched cattle with a fine-toothed comb in the hopes of finding an exquisite new cut they could bring to market. After much research, they found an underappreciated muscle in the shoulder that would provide a delicious, well-marbled piece of beef if cut correctly. The new cut was dubbed the "flat iron steak," supposedly because it is shaped somewhat like an old-fashioned flat iron.

5. Porterhouse Steak

The origin of the term "porterhouse" is surprisingly contentious, as several cities and establishments claim to have coined it. There's some evidence that it might have originated on Manhattan's Pearl Street around 1814, when porter house proprietor Martin Morrison started serving particularly large T-bones. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists this etymology as the likely origin of the steak's name while noting that there's no contemporary evidence to support or contradict the tale.

This origin story gained traction in the late 19th century, but others contend a Cambridge, Massachusetts, hotel and restaurant proprietor named Zachariah B. Porter lent his name to the cut of beef. Still others claim that the steak takes its name from the Porter House, a popular hotel in 19th-century Flowery Branch, Georgia.

6. Ketchup

What about that other grilling essential, ketchup? The word "catchup" has been in the English language since the 17th century, but it didn't always refer to the delicious tomato sauce we all love. Although the etymology of the word is debated, many scholars think that it may have originated as a Chinese word for a fish sauce in the Amoy dialect. It's unclear whether the word entered the English language directly from the Amoy or through the Malay word *kichap*, which itself is borrowed from the Amoy dialect.

Wherever the word originated, it didn't originally refer to the delightful condiment we wolf down by the packet. Tomato ketchup didn't appear until the late 18th or early 19th centuries; the original "ketchup" in the English world was more usually more of a briny mixture that was often made from mushrooms or nuts.

7. Oscar Mayer



The name on the side of the Wienermobile came from an actual guy, Oscar Ferdinand Mayer immigrated to the United States from Bavaria as a teenager during the 1870s. After originally living with a cousin in Detroit, Mayer moved to Chicago in 1876 and worked as a butcher at a North Side meat market. Seven years later he started his own sausage shop with his brother Gottfried, who had been living back in Germany and learning the skills of a "wurstmacher."

The Mayer brothers' business was a runaway success with the German immigrants in their Chicago neighborhood. By 1888 the business was so strong that their landlord refused to renew their lease and tried to open his own sausage shop in their storefront. (Big surprise: it failed.) The Mayer brothers kept cranking out meats from a new factory, though, and thanks to a savvy marketing plan that involved sponsoring polka bands, their brand moved nationwide within a few decades.

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brat means fried, grilled or roasted in german (the verb is braten)- so a bratwurst means a fried or grilled sausage.

posted by [Laura](#) on [7-1-2010 at 3:55 pm](#)

The original Little Oscar, who drove in the weinermobile, was portrayed by Meinhardt Raabe, who also played the coroner in The Wizard of Oz.

posted by [Steven](#) on [7-1-2010 at 4:45 pm](#)

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