

Legend, History and a Dash of Creativity: The Birth of Tramezzini, Vermouth and Gianduiotti

FROM TOAST TO TRAMEZZINO

When it comes to the origins of food, there is usually a healthy mix of history, legend and “well, somebody must have invented it somehow.” But in the case of the **tramezzino**, we are unusually lucky: we know who created it, where it happened, and even when.

Angela Demichelis left for America at the age of 15 in the early 1900s. In Detroit, she met and married **Onorino Nebiolo**, who was twice her age and ran restaurants and nightclubs with his brothers and brothers-in-law.

After some time, however, the desire to return to Italy became too strong. There were also rumours that the Nebiolos’ businesses had attracted the attention of the Italo-American mafia — perhaps another good reason to head back to Turin!

When they discovered that **Amilcare Mulassano**, owner of the famous Distilleria Sacco, was selling his café in Piazza Castello, they decided to return home. In **1925**, using their savings from America, they bought the café.

Angela was a determined and rather modern woman — she had even obtained her driving licence in the United States — and she soon gave the café a new direction. The Nebiolos also brought something else back from America: **one of the first toasters in Turin**. But Angela had a better idea.

Why simply make toast when you could do something more interesting with the bread?

She took soft **pancarré**, removed the crust, left it untoasted, and turned it into small sandwiches filled with tasty ingredients. Legend has it that among the first combinations were **butter and anchovies** — perhaps not the combination you would invent for a first date, but clearly one that worked! The little sandwiches were an immediate success.

But every successful invention needs a name. And this is where **Gabriele D’Annunzio** enters the story.



In 1926, the famous Italian poet happened to be in Turin and decided to try the new speciality everyone was talking about. After enjoying the little sandwiches with his vermouth, he ordered another round and called them “**tramezzini**.”

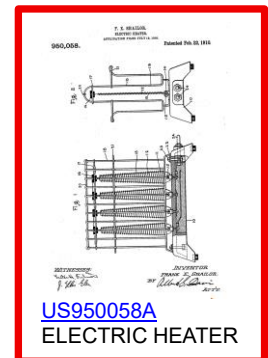
The name stuck. And Turin had given Italy another classic.

PANCARRÉ: THE UPSIDE-DOWN LOAF

But our story does not end with the tramezzino. We have to take another step backwards, to the humble loaf of bread from which Angela removed the crust.

Although pancarré was already well known and popular, at the time it was still a relatively new product and, at least according to one tradition, another Turin invention.

One legend places its origins in **15th-century Turin**, during the Duchy of Amadeus VIII of Savoy. This was not exactly a peaceful period: the death penalty was in force and executioners, or *boia*, were certainly not the most popular people in town.



In fact, they were rather unpopular — despite having one significant advantage: they were apparently quite well paid.

In the 19th century, for example, a university professor might earn around 1,000 lire a year, while an executioner could receive about 2,000 lire as a fixed salary, plus bonuses: 21 lire for a hanging, 36 lire for a quartering, and even tips. Not a particularly attractive career choice, perhaps, but financially quite competitive!

According to the legend, the bakers expressed their contempt in the simplest possible way: whenever the executioner bought bread, they handed it to him **upside down**.

The executioner was not amused and complained to the authorities. The authorities, understandably, prohibited such discriminatory behaviour.



But the bakers were not going to give up so easily. They supposedly invented a loaf shaped like a **brick**, identical on both sides, so that it could be served upside down without anyone noticing.

A wonderfully inventive story, although almost certainly just that: a story.

Still, it is interesting because it draws attention to a product known by its French name, **pancarré**, which at least during the same period was apparently not known beyond the Alps.

So, is this further proof of the Turin origins of one of the world's most familiar bread products? Perhaps. Or perhaps the bakers simply had a very good sense of humour.

THE AMERICAN SIDE OF THE STORY

There is, however, another completely different theory.

According to this version, the origins of modern sliced bread lie in the **United States at the beginning of the 20th century**, together with the arrival of the first toasters and the development of industrial bread production.

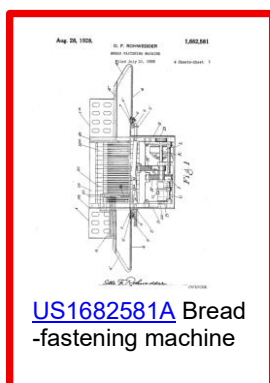
A soft, rectangular loaf was ideal for mass production. European bakers had already experimented with square, lidded baking pans in the 19th century to reduce the amount of crust.

Then came **George Pullman**, the pioneer of railway sleeping cars. He used the square loaf on his Pullman railcars because it made much better use of the limited kitchen space: **three Pullman loaves could occupy the same space as two traditional round-topped loaves**.

Efficiency, even in bread!

The loaf therefore became known as the “**Pullman Loaf**.”

THE “SLICER”



Another major step came in **1912**, when German American inventor **Otto Rohwedder** invented the automatic bread slicer. The machine was eventually commercialised in 1928 by the Chilicord Baking Company.

And sliced bread became such a success that it entered the English language itself. In the United States, when something is considered a brilliant invention, people still say it is “**the best thing since sliced bread**.”

So, whatever the true origins of pancarré, there is one thing we can say with confidence: the tramezzino owes quite a lot to both **Turin and America**.

And, of course, all these technical details ultimately have to pass the most important test: does it taste good? Especially with a glass of **Vermouth**.

THE PHARMACIST WINE

And now we come to Vermouth, a drink whose history begins rather far away from the elegant aperitivo we know today.

Herbal and fortified wines date back to at least **1250–1000 BC in China**, where herbs and roots were added to wine for medicinal purposes. Similar herbal alcoholic drinks were known in **ancient India**.

The ancient Greeks also had their own version. From around **400 BC**, they infused white wine with various ingredients, including **wormwood**, which was believed to help with stomach problems and even intestinal parasites.

In other words, long before Vermouth became fashionable, people were already thinking: *wine is good... but perhaps it would be even better with a few herbs in it*.

Of course, these ancient Chinese, Indian and Greek drinks do not prove that modern European Vermouth directly originated from them. But they do show that the idea of combining wine with herbs for medicinal purposes is very, very old.

By the **16th century**, wines containing wormwood as a principal ingredient were being produced in Germany. Around the same period, an Italian merchant named **D'Alessio** began producing a similar drink in Piedmont, describing it as a kind of “wormwood wine.”

His version did not stop at wormwood: it contained a whole collection of other botanical ingredients.

Soon, competitors appeared in eastern and southeastern France, each guarding its own secret recipe of herbs, roots, bark and spices - rather like medieval alchemists - but with a considerably more enjoyable final product.

Over time, two main styles emerged: one **pale, dry and bitter**, the other **red and sweeter**.

Then came the decisive Turin contribution.

In **1786**, Antonio Benedetto **Carpano** created the first commercial Italian Vermouth in Turin. He used quality ingredients, added spirits to the herbal wine, and called it “**Vermut**,” from the German word **Wermut** for wormwood. Since French was still the main language in the Savoy area, the name gradually evolved into the one we know today: **Vermouth**.

And here comes the interesting transformation: what had originally been something resembling a **medicinal drink** became an elegant **aperitif**.

By the end of the 19th century, it had also become a favourite ingredient of bartenders. Cocktails such as the **Manhattan and Martini** eventually turned Vermouth into a global star.

Not bad for a drink that started out as something you might have taken from the pharmacist!

FROM PIEDMONT TO THE WORLD

Thanks to the first Savoy entrepreneurs, Vermouth soon crossed the borders of Piedmont and became an international success.

Imitations appeared, particularly in France, while in the United States the growing popularity of mixology gave Vermouth an entirely new life.

It became one of the essential ingredients of cocktails and inspired the development of other bitter, herb- and spice-infused wines, including **chinato** and the so-called **Americano**, Vermouth-based drinks combined with bitter ingredients for an extra kick.

Piedmont had once again managed to turn a local speciality into something with global ambitions.

HOW IT ALMOST DISAPPEARED

But success is never guaranteed.

After the Vermouth boom of the early 20th century, production declined following the Second World War. Some major producers eventually closed, while others abandoned Vermouth in favour of sweeter and “easier” products.

Consumer tastes were changing. Market research showed a growing preference for lighter and softer drinks, with less alcohol.

Vermouth therefore came dangerously close to becoming a **memory** — something ordered in old-fashioned village bars by a few nostalgic enthusiasts who still remembered what the good stuff tasted like.

Fortunately, the story did not end there.

THE VINTAGE REVIVAL

Then came the **2000s**.

The growing fascination with vintage culture brought with it a renewed appetite for authentic, traditional and unusual products. Vermouth was rediscovered.

It was no longer seen simply as a standardized drink, but as a **flavoured wine combining old recipes, craftsmanship and local botanicals**, where the challenge was to find the right balance between the character of the wine and the aromas of the herbs and spices.

Vermouth returned to its roots and, in the process, became fashionable again.

The revival was particularly embraced by a new generation of **American mixologists**, fascinated by Italian traditions and eager to experiment with classic ingredients in new cocktails.

Vermouth had gone from medicine to aperitif, from aperitif to cocktail ingredient, almost disappeared, and then come back as a fashionable symbol of Italian mixology.

Not a bad career for one drink!

[AT12829U1](#) WERMUT-BITTERGETRÄNK

[CN102660427A](#) Composite vermouth of sugarcane, pineapple and ginger juice and brewage method thereof

[HU176507B](#) METHOD FOR MAKING VERMUTH-LIKE SPICED WINES

[JP2021040577A](#) ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE WITH VERMOUTH FLAVOR AND METHOD FOR PRODUCING THE SAME

[RU2184141C2](#) VERMOUTH PRODUCTION PROCESS

[UA62219A](#) A COMPOSITION OF INGREDIENTS FOR "CRIMEA BOUQUET", AROMATIZED BEVERAGE, WHITE OR ROSE OR RED SWEET VERMOUTH

Today, Vermouth once again represents a particularly Italian combination of **tradition, craftsmanship and innovation**.

THE NAPOLEONIC BLOCKADE

And finally, we arrive at the **gianduiotto** — another Turin speciality whose origins are connected, surprisingly enough, to Napoleon.

In **1806**, Napoleon Bonaparte imposed the Continental Blockade, preventing British ships from docking at European ports.

This created a serious problem for Turin's chocolatiers: the British were among the main importers of cocoa from the Americas, so cocoa suddenly became **scarce and very expensive**.

But Piedmontese chocolatiers were not about to give up chocolate!

Instead, they came up with a wonderfully pragmatic solution: **replace part of the cocoa with something local**.

And what could be better than the excellent *Tonda Gentile* hazelnuts from the Langhe? They were abundant, high quality and considerably cheaper than cocoa.

The result was **gianduia paste**, followed later by the famous **gianduiotto**.

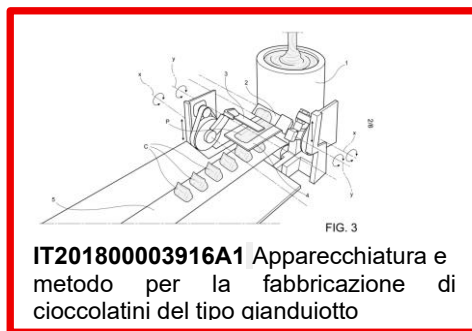


Authentic gianduia hazelnut chocolate must contain at least 32% total dry cocoa solids and between 20% and 40% finely ground hazelnuts.

Gianduiotti are small, boat-shaped chocolates, traditionally wrapped individually in golden foil and designed to melt smoothly in the mouth. They were first introduced in Turin during the 1865 Carnival by Caffarel, one of Piedmont's oldest chocolate makers, and have since become the quintessential expression of gianduia.

Artisanal gianduiotti are often made by hand, giving them an exceptionally smooth, creamy texture that brings out the rich flavour of the hazelnuts. Among the favourites are those made by Gobino and Peyrano.

And, for those who haven't made the connection yet, one of the most famous descendants of this family is... **Nutella**. So, indirectly, Napoleon's blockade helped inspire one of the world's most famous chocolate-and-hazelnut combinations. History can be surprisingly sweet.



And Napoleon was not finished with the food industry.

The Continental Blockade also disrupted imports of **cane sugar from the West Indies**. The shortage encouraged France to develop sugar production from **beetroot**. Scientists improved the extraction process, and Napoleon supported the construction of beet-sugar factories.

The result was the development of Europe's modern **beet sugar industry**.

So perhaps there is a lesson here: **Every cloud has a silver lining, and sometimes, apparently, a tramezzino, a glass of Vermouth and a gianduiotto!**

And that brings us to another interesting part of the story: **taste is only half the battle**.

These products also had to build an identity, protect their reputation and conquer the market, often with the help of some wonderfully colourful trademarks.