



VOLUME XXXVII, NUMBER 1 WINTER 2021

# Repast

Quarterly Publication of the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

*Traditional choice FOR HOLIDAY FEASTING*

**HOLIDAY GLAMOUR.** The Bell, whole pears cooked in cinnamon syrup; cream cheese balls for clappers. The Mistletoe berries, cream cheese balls; leaves, green pepper, stem, a pretzel stick, the bow, pieces of pear.

Two styles: Blue Label—for easy cooking at home; Red Label—ham that's cooked and ready to eat. In buying a slice, look for the word SWIFT down the side.

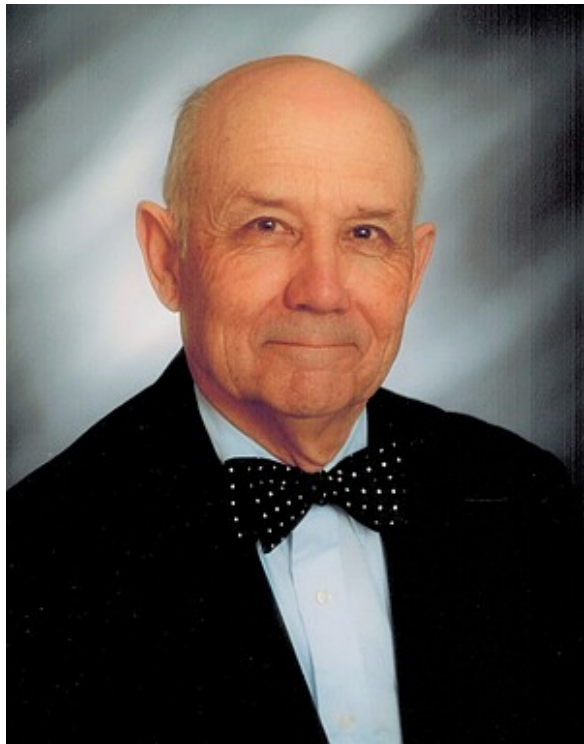
You honour your guests with America's traditional favorite when you serve them Swift's Premium Ham. Three generations of hostesses have prized this ham above all others. Its matchless quality—rigidly maintained—has won acknowledged leadership. So overwhelming is this national preference that in time of tight production Swift's Premium Ham may be hard to find.

*Swift's Premium Ham*  
BROWN SUGAR CURED!

*We poke  
our snouts  
into  
Christmas  
hams*

An investigation by Stavros Macrakis (pp. 6-10) reveals that the holiday custom of sweet-glazed ham was not brought to the U.S. from Europe, but instead was invented in America little more than a century ago.

Dressed up almost as if it were a dessert, a ham cured with brown sugar was featured in this 1946 "holiday glamour" ad from Swift and Company. The Christmas-bell decorations that surround the ham were carved from pears cooked in cinnamon syrup and then dyed red, each one stuffed with a ball of cream cheese as a "clapper". The mistletoe sprigs were fashioned from pretzel sticks, pieces of green pepper, and more cream-cheese balls, while the bow on top is made from red-dyed pear shavings.



## John G. Ragsdale, Jr., 1924 – 2020

We recently learned that John G. Ragsdale, Jr., had died last June 21 in Cypress, TX, at age 95. John is best known to food enthusiasts for his writings about camp cooking and the history of the Dutch oven. His *Repast* article, “Dutch Ovens: Classic Cooking Vessels of the Heartland”, was published in our Summer 2007 issue.

Mr. Ragsdale was a petroleum engineer who spent most of his career in southern Arkansas, with shorter stints in Texas, Louisiana, and Calgary. For many years he ran a timber farm as a sideline. His enthusiasm about camping and the Dutch oven was kindled during his decades of volunteer work with the Boy Scouts of America. His books *Dutch Oven Cooking* (1973) and *Camper’s Guide to Outdoor Cooking* (1989) were heavily used in scouting groups and were frequently reprinted, with sales in the hundreds of thousands. *Dutch Ovens Chronicled: Their Use in the United States* (1991) documented the story of that utensil in early American cooking. Mr. Ragsdale would demonstrate historical Dutch oven cooking at Ozark Folk Center State Park in Mountain View, AR, and eventually donated his collection of Dutch ovens to the Historic Arkansas Museum in Little Rock. He led the successful campaign to have the Dutch oven declared the Official Historic Cooking Vessel of Arkansas.

Cornbread and mayhaw jelly were two other topics from the American heartland about which Mr. Ragsdale wrote more briefly. In a 2003 oral history interview with the Univ. of Arkansas Libraries, he said that the recipes he included in his writings were partly adapted from his mother, his wife, or friends, but “I had my own ideas and ingredients” that he brought to the kitchen. Just as in exploring a new oilfield, the time would come to put it to the test:

I had an elderly woman across the street who didn’t cook a thing. I would take her samples and I would ask her for her opinion. I never got her opinion—everything was good. That is not what I needed. I told her to give me a true report— “especially if you don’t like something.”

The interviewer replied, “Well, Southerners are going to tell you it’s good unless it’s really bad. Then they won’t tell you. They just won’t eat it!”

Besides scouting, John did volunteer work with Habitat for Humanity, the Center for Aging, and the Mission Service Corps, a Baptist group, often accompanied by his wife, Dora Dean “DeDe” Ragsdale (née Johnson). Among many other acts of generosity, they set up two college scholarship programs with the Arkansas Community Foundation; endowed a professorship in Arkansas Studies at Southern Arkansas Univ. in Magnolia; established the annual J. G. Ragsdale Book Award of the Arkansas Historical Assn.; and helped fund the book publication program of the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies in Little Rock. The couple, who are survived by three of their children, 11 grandchildren, and several great-grandchildren, are interred side by side in the mausoleum at Arlington Memorial Park in El Dorado, AR. ■

# Repast

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# DR. WEAVER RAIDS THE PHILADELPHIA LARDER— AGAIN!

by Randy K. Schwartz

“Philadelphia at the Table: Sleuthing the Paper Trails of Culinary History in Library Company Collections and Regional Archives” was the title of an online discussion led by William Woys Weaver via Zoom last Nov. 23. Dr. Weaver, an internationally-known food ethnographer and historian, is an adjunct professor of Food and Hospitality Management at Drexel Univ. in Philadelphia. He has written some 20 books on food history and heritage seeds, and is currently at work on a culinary history of Philadelphia.

The talk was hosted by the Library Company of Philadelphia (LCP), a non-profit library founded by Benjamin Franklin. Back in 1986-87, Dr. Weaver had served as guest curator for “The Larder Invaded”, an LCP exhibit on the richly multicultural history of the city’s food. The exhibit treated visitors to samples of exemplary dishes, and was also accompanied by a pair of books: Weaver’s own *Thirty Five Receipts from the Larder Invaded* and Mary Alice Hines’s *Larder Invaded: Reflections on Three Centuries of Philadelphia Food and Drink*. Last year, LCP’s young Visitor Services Coordinator, Katie Maxwell, thought about those two books and embarked on a personal venture to prepare most of the 35 featured historical dishes— one by one in her own kitchen, in the midst of the pandemic. She has been thoughtfully documenting it all with recipes and photos in a series of blog entries (<https://librarycompany.org/news>), and it was Katie who conceived of the Nov. 23 event and emceed it.

Dr. Weaver focused his remarks on three of the dishes that Katie tackled early in her campaign. Pickled red cabbage, for one, is a recipe from *The English Art of Cookery According to the Present Practice*, a book published by tavern cook Richard Briggs in London in 1788 and then in a Philadelphia edition in 1792. The cabbage is chopped well and combined with red-wine vinaigrette, white sugar, cloves, mace, and allspice, plus cochineal to help stabilize the color. The dish is then aged for a few days at room temperature. This was consumed in well-to-do households either as a “sallet” or as a condiment with roasts. Most of the ingredients were luxury items. For example, red cabbage was typically grown in a kitchen garden by a hired gardener and was much less plentiful than white cabbage, which was used by the region’s many German and Dutch families to make sauerkraut, a staple.

Blackberry pudding is an 1886 recipe from Sarah Tyson Rorer and her Philadelphia School of Cookery, which she had founded in 1884 to teach women how to cook at home. As with Boston brown bread and other Victorian-era puddings, it is steam-baked in a mold for 2-3 hours. It calls for berries, flour, eggs, milk, and butter, but the most distinctive ingredient is baking powder, a then-modern leavening that Rorer was champi-



Katie Maxwell of the Library Company of Philadelphia baked a crusty no-knead bread and also used fresh basil to accompany her leek soup, which she made with a recipe drawn from a 1917 vegetarian cookbook.

oning. The powder, a mixture of saleratus (baking soda) and cream of tartar, had gotten a big boost at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition. Although the pudding itself is made without sugar, before it is served it can be topped with the accompanying Fairy Butter sauce made with butter, egg white, powdered sugar, and sherry. The pudding is substantial and can feed a family for days in various forms, initially with the sauce and then, when less fresh, either drenched with milk, toasted and buttered, or French-toasted.

Leek soup is a 1906 recipe included in *Vegetarian Diet and Dishes* (1917) by Benjamin Smith Lyman, a mining engineer from Massachusetts who fell in love with vegetarianism when he worked in Japan before settling in Philadelphia. Sliced leek whites, onions, and shallots are all used in this recipe. They are sautéed in butter and olive oil before being boiled in water (no milk or cream) along with diced potato, salt, and white pepper. A century on, the recipe is probably too plain for contemporary tastes, but Lyman’s intent was to bring out the savor of the fresh vegetables. When it comes to vegetarianism in America, Philadelphia was the city of the “founding fathers”. Franklin himself was a practitioner for a number of years, and the Quakers and other pacifist and religious groups in the region also welcomed the practice. The city’s Bible-Christian Church, an offshoot of Swedenborgianism, was the first vegetarian church in the U.S., and its minister co-founded the American Vegetarian Society in 1850. A little south of the city, John Landis Mason of Cumberland Co., NJ, designed his Mason jar to make it easier for people to go meatless year-round; it was patented in 1857. In the 1860s, Joseph A. Campbell, from the same county, started a vegetarian canning enterprise that evolved into Campbell’s Soup of Camden, NJ. By the early 1900s, Weaver noted, there were already vegan cafés in Philly.

Some other interesting recipes from “The Larder Invaded”:

- carrot pudding (1699), from an English manuscript of Anne Toller
- artichoke hearts stuffed with cream sauce (1734)
- pig’s-brain dumplings

*continued on page 10*

# CHAA FALL PROGRAMS



## THE MIDWEST IN MICROCOSM

Because of safety concerns during the Covid-19 pandemic, three speakers for the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor kindly agreed to reschedule their presentations from in-person to online Zoom events. Those meetings focused on aspects of the traditional foodways of Native American, Anglo American, and Chinese American people in the Midwest. Since the year 2020 marked the centennial of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution, the Fall schedule also included a timely talk on American suffragist cookbooks.

With up to 70 people tuning in “live” on their digital devices— from London, England to San Diego, California— these Zoom talks are reaching much larger and more far-flung audiences than did CHAA’s recent on-ground meetings. Further, our partner and host, the Ann Arbor District Library, will be posting the recordings on their YouTube channel starting with the Sep. talk (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zFfjT8qBMQ>). We thank the hard-working folks at AADL and our incoming Program Chair, Glenda Bullock, for their superb efforts in organizing, publicizing, pulling off, and recording these meetings. We also got some generous start-up help from Catherine Lambrecht, an officer with the Chicago Culinary Historians and the Greater Midwest Foodways Alliance.

### It’s Not Just in Chinatown Anymore

**Frances Kai-Hwa Wang** spoke to us about “Chinese Food: Customs and Culture” on Sep. 20, which was Mid-Autumn Festival time in China. Moon cakes, she explained, are the foods most associated with that full-moon or harvest festival: cylinders of pastry with dense, sweet fillings made either with dates, lotus root, red beans, pineapple, or other ingredients.

Dr. Wang, an Ann Arbor-based journalist, teacher, speaker, and activist on Asian issues and culture, acknowledged at the start of her talk that Chinese-influenced food now enjoys mainstream popularity in the U.S., where there are about 40,000 Chinese restaurants. However, she hastened to add, it wasn’t always that way! Such restaurants arose in the U.S. to serve mainly young Asian men— workers and indentured servants in the mining and railroad booms out West, starting in 1849. Racists slandered the fare as unhealthy and un-American. A pamphlet from the American Federation of Labor supported passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act by asking, “Meat vs. Rice, American Manhood vs. Asian Coolieism— which shall survive?” The act, which remained in force from 1882 to 1943, did make an entry exception for Asian merchants— which helps explain why shops and eateries proliferated in early Chinatowns. The Pekin Noodle Parlor, established in Butte, Montana in 1909, is the oldest continuously-operated Chinese restaurant in the

country. By the 1910s, Frances told us, in big cities such as Chicago a “chop suey date” in Chinatown was considered risqué but hip. Most such early restaurants were owned by people from a single city (Toisan, in what is now Guangdong province)— an unfortunate turn, since Chinese cuisine is extremely diverse, with eight main traditions ranging from the wheat-based north to the rice-dominant south and other regions. Grubhub recently named General Tso’s Chicken as the most popular takeout food in America, but it’s not actually a dish that is eaten in China. Nor, we learned, are Chop Suey, Egg Foo Young, Orange Chicken, or Almond Boneless Chicken.

Dr. Wang enjoys explaining Chinese characters, phrases, and symbols that are food-related. We learned that the single character for *fan* can mean “rice”, “meal”, or “food”. The phrase “sour, sweet, bitter, spicy” refers to a balance of flavors, and also to the ups and downs of life. To “eat tofu” can also mean to flirt. Dining on a whole chicken is an omen for the whole family being together; golden mandarin oranges are an omen for good luck and togetherness; a whole fish, for abundance (since the characters for “fish” and “abundance” are homophones); dumplings, for wealth (since they resemble silver ingots); and soybean sprouts, for wishes granted (since they resemble ancient scepters).

### No One Asked the Natives

When we purchase “wild rice” at a store, it is almost always a commercial version that’s been cultivated in a flooded paddy, resulting in uniform black grains. Indigenous wild rice, which the Potawatomi called *manoomin* (muh-NO-min), “the good berry”, has multi-colored grains of varying length, needs much less cooking time, and is much higher-priced and harder to find. In a talk on Oct. 18, Lansing resident and endangered-species biologist **Barbara J. Barton** explained that wild rice was once found in lakes and streams all over Michigan, with the largest beds along the shores of the Great Lakes. In fact, in the early 1900s, she told us, there was a “cereal battle” in Michigan after the USDA began to consider popularizing wild-rice foods, but had to back off due to an outcry from farmers who grew the traditional grains for breakfast cereals.

Wild rice appears in natives’ ancient lore and remains a key part of their identity. It was a staple food of the Three Fires tribes— the Potawatomi, Odawa, and Ojibwe. Wild rice is actually not rice but a grass, and grows in gently flowing, shallow water from seeds dropped by the plants the previous year. Tragically, most of the former rice beds in the region have been lost. Key factors were the construction of river dams; logging companies that did damming, dredging, and log running on rivers; pollution from paper, auto, and steel plants; and the draining of swamps for muck farming and to fight malaria. When the rice beds began to disappear, duck populations also fell. In fact, a whole ecosystem— and, for the tribes, a whole way of life— was being destroyed. No one consulted with the native people about these destructive activities; in effect, Barton told us, their resources were stolen from them.

But in recent years, tribal members as well as local and state agencies have tried to restore wild rice beds in certain historic locations and to seed new ones elsewhere. Barton, who wrote the award-winning book *Manoomin: The Story of Wild*

## Recipe: Manoomin in Birch Bark

*The last chapter of Barbara Barton's book Manoomin: The Story of Wild Rice in Michigan features recipes contributed by various people. This one is from Renee "Wasson" Dillard, a fiber artist in the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians.*

Get a bed of hot coals with some steady rocks on the bottom. Rocks hold up the birch bowl. Soak ½ cup of rice for about an hour. Place the rice in the bowl on the coals with 3 cups of water. Bring to a boil. Put in 1 cup diced cattail shoots. Add ¼ cup diced wild leeks. Add a handful of winterberries. Add 1½ cups diced filet fish. Simmer until fish is cooked. Take the birch bowl off the rocks. Some of the birch bowl edges may have burnt and fallen into the soup, which adds flavor. Eat hot and enjoy!

*Rice in Michigan* (Michigan State Univ. Press, 2018) and is a member of the state's wild rice working group, was able to secure a grant that supported Ojibwe elders in teaching their rice know-how to other tribal members. She personally joined with them to help spread the skills statewide. The skills involve establishing shore-based rice camps in the autumn; going out to harvest the rice in two-person canoes, one poling the boat, the other knocking ripe seeds into the hold with a pair of wooden sticks; drying the seeds outdoors; hulling them by fire-parching followed by pounding; and air-winnowing to separate grain from chaff.

### Apples as Folk Memory

When **Lucy M. Long** spoke about "Apples in the Midwestern Imagination" on Nov. 15, it was peak apple time in our region. Dr. Long, an independent scholar and the founding Director of the Center for Food and Culture in Bowling Green, OH, has been researching this topic for 25 years. She views apples and apple customs through three lenses: as objects of memory, which is a perspective defined by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett for the study of heritage and oral history; as foodways; and as objects of rituals and festive events.

A key aspect of apple husbandry, Dr. Long explained, is that the trees do not naturally "breed true", so labor-intensive grafting is generally used to maintain an orchard that produces only one variety of the fruit. The domestic apple (*Malus domestica*) is descended from a wild apple native to the mountain forests of what is now Kazakhstan. Ages before the trees were first brought to the New World, they benefited from centuries of culture in Eurasia. By ancient Roman times such traditions as apple sauce, and dishes of pork with apples, had already arisen. The wild "crabapple" native to the U.S. is not a true apple; cultivation of the domesticated Old World apple was introduced to the American colonies by English pilgrims in Massachusetts Bay, and a little later by Dutch settlers in New Netherlands. Later, settlers in the Northwest Territory beyond the Ohio River often planted apple orchards as evidence of having a self-sufficient farmstead. Born in Massachusetts, the nurseryman John Chapman ("Johnny Appleseed") and his brother owned orchards in Mansfield, OH in the early 1800s.

John used seeds from there to plant apple trees all over the region, an expression of Swedenborgian harmony with nature. Later that century, however, some orchards were cut down when the region became a stronghold in prohibiting alcoholic beverages, including hard cider. In response, people embraced new breeds of "sweet" apples ideal for making sweet cider, pastries, apple butter, etc., a dynamic that exemplifies the Midwestern tension between conservatism and innovation (think: Henry Ford). In the Midwest, making apple butter in a huge kettle over an open fire was a traditional means of preserving the fruit, a custom adapted from German immigrants and Amish people in the Middle Atlantic states who had made what they called "butters" from plums or tomatoes.

As a source of sweetness, apples were far cheaper than cane sugar, honey, and maple and sorghum syrups. In 1884, Congregationalist reformer Henry Ward Beecher referred to them as "democratic fruit" because they were healthful and versatile, appealing to all geographic, ethnic, and religious groups in America. This sentiment underlies the phrase, "as American as apple pie". Today, apples are grown in all 50 states, commercially in 36 states with about 100 varieties. Distinctive customs in Ohio include the esteem for Johnny Appleseed as a local folk hero, the popularity of apple butter, and the plethora of festivals devoted to apples, cider, butter, or dumplings. Michigan, for its part, also has many apple festivals and is a leader in producing hard cider. Dr. Long reminded us that the festivals aren't just for frolic. They are "theaters" where the actors can recall fond memories and, for the benefit of young people and outsiders, re-enact and reconstruct such customs and rituals as picking ripe apples, sometimes in heirloom varieties; making butter in kettles; pressing and filtering cider; and making and enjoying oven-baked or fried sweets ranging from pies, cobblers and crisps to cakes, cookies and doughnuts.

### The Milk of Human Kindness

During the long battle for women's suffrage in America, which lasted from 1848 to the early 1920s, activists decided to involve food and cookbooks to help counter the charge that women's entry into public affairs would lead to the neglect of families. Besides, what has more mass persuasive appeal than good food? **Laura Kumin**, a Washington, DC attorney-turned-author, teacher, and cooking coach, spoke on Dec. 6 about her new book, *All Stirred Up: Suffrage Cookbooks, Food, and the Battle for Women's Right to Vote* (Pegasus Books, 2020). To help promote their cause, she told us, women set up "suffrage lunchrooms" serving free meals to women and men; produced chinaware bearing suffrage movement ads; and published recipe books and booklets.

After reviewing the history of the movement, Ms. Kumin focused on her study of the eight cooking publications that survive. These books were used to prepare food for movement gatherings and were also sold to raise funds, including door-to-door. The oldest known full cookbook of the suffrage movement came from Boston in the 1880s, soon followed by *The Holiday Gift Cookbook* (Rockford, IL). Later ones came from Washington State; Long Beach, CA; Detroit/ Wayne Co., MI; and Pittsburgh, PA. Some of the books wove in pro-suffrage writings or metaphorical recipes (calling for ingredients such as

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# HOW OLD IS AMERICAN CHRISTMAS HAM?

by Stavros Macrakis

*Dr. Stavros M. Macrakis and his wife Robin live in Cambridge, MA, and are members of the Culinary Historians of Boston. An MIT and Harvard alumnus, he is a software engineer and has worked in software for 50 years, in a variety of areas. His other interests include eating and cooking, food history, architecture and design, languages and linguistics, and the history of encyclopedias.*

Every Christmas, many of us in North America look forward to the traditional, old-fashioned Christmas ham, its skin beautifully cross-cut and glazed with bourbon and brown sugar, each diamond studded with a clove, often garnished with rings of pineapple and maraschino cherries.

But why ham? Different foods are associated with various holidays: turkey for Thanksgiving, ham or lamb for Easter, salmon for the Fourth of July, and so on. But when did glazed ham come to be associated with Christmas in the U.S.? After all, turkey was the standard Christmas holiday dish in America starting in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century (Smith 2007, pp. 126-127).

It always piques my curiosity when some dish is claimed to be “traditional”— it makes me wonder how old it really is, where it came from, and if it was actually a conscious invention (Hobsbawm 1983). I’ve also long wondered how American cooking came to be so sweet (Hess 1977, p. 91 and *passim*). So in Dec. 2019, when Prof. Barbara Santich in Australia asked the Culinary Historians of Boston mailing list about American Christmas ham and wondered aloud whether it might be a promotion of the American pork industry, I decided to look into it.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, ham in general was common in America, although for special occasions multiple meats would be served (Carroll 2013, p. 34). But ham in particular does not seem to have been especially prized, nor associated with Christmas.

The first surprise that I had when I started to look into the history of Christmas ham is that it doesn’t seem to be a very old tradition in America.

## Christmas Turkey was Far More Popular than Ham

For my first try at understanding the history, I used Google’s nGram Viewer, which graphs the frequency of speci-

fied words or phrases— as found in a huge corpus of books— sequentially over time (Google nGrams; Michel, *et al.*, 2011). Specifically, I compared the phrases “Christmas turkey” and “Christmas ham” in the U.S. and the U.K. To ensure that I wasn’t just seeing an increase in the reporting of food-related or Christmas-related topics, I divided the count of those terms by the counts for the phrase “Christmas dinner”.

I found that in both American and British books, the term “Christmas turkey” is far more common than “Christmas ham”, even today, and “Christmas ham” only really emerged after 1900 (see Fig. 1 on facing page). In 1940, for example, Christmas turkey was still mentioned about 13 times as often as Christmas ham in the context of Christmas dinner in the U.S.

To make sure that the increasing mention of Christmas ham in recent decades doesn’t simply reflect an increasing popularity of ham in general, rather than Christmas ham in particular, I scaled the data by expressing them as a percentage of all mentions of “ham” (see Fig. 2). Again, it looks as though Christmas ham took off after 1900, and accelerated after 1960. Given these data, it is easy to dismiss the neo-pagan story that American Christmas ham is a continuation of pagan Scandinavian sacrifices of boars to the god Freyr, or later Yuletide banquets featuring boars’ heads (Draco 2017, Chapt. 1).

Newspaper data similarly show increasing mentions of “Christmas ham” starting in the 1880s, and growing fastest until 1920, with another growth spurt in the 1950s (see Fig. 3). The Newspapers.com search tool does not support scaling of mentions for other factors, which probably explains the divergence from the nGrams data after 1970.

## Infrequent Appearances in Menus and Cookbooks

Another approach to understanding the popularity of Christmas ham is based on collections of old menus. These are typically from prestigious establishments, so they give us some insight into elite tastes. The New York Public Library has collected and digitized about 17,500 historical menus, mostly from 1890 to 1940 (New York Public Library, 2011). Unfortunately, it is in no way a random sample: it is unclear why those particular menus from those particular restaurants were collected, and the distribution in time is rather narrow: 61% of the menus date from 1899-1918, and fully 33% are from just the two years 1900-1901. So I couldn’t do much of a time series analysis.

Still, with 56 menus at 53 different restaurants for Christmas dinners from 1893 to 1907, I could get an idea of what was considered suitable for Christmas dinner. Turkey appears on 45 of the 56 menus; beef on 44; chicken, 34; sweetbreads, 22; duck, 20; quail, 18; roast pig, 13; goose, 11; ham, 10; game birds, 10; lamb, 8; and rabbit, 2. That is, it seems that beef was quasi-obligatory for a Christmas menu, while ham appears only occasionally. Three of the 10 ham dish names indicate some sort of sauce or glaze, although probably not sweetened: “Ham glacé, Biarritz, Yorkshire Sauce”, “Virginia Ham, Champagne Sauce”,

*continued on page 8*

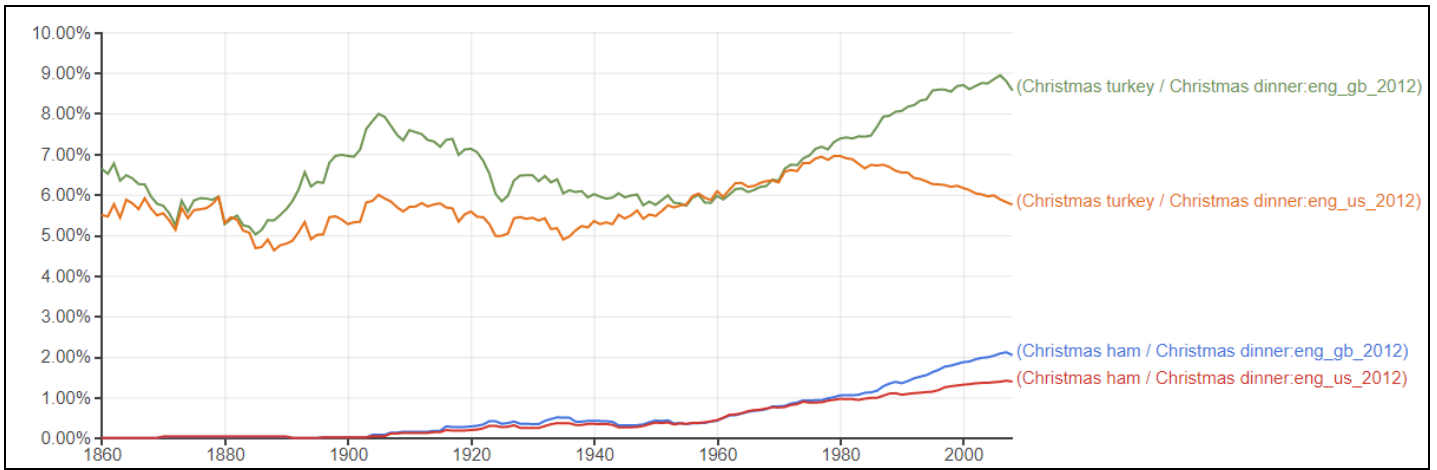


Figure 1. Results of a Google nGrams frequency analysis of [Christmas ham] and [Christmas turkey] as a fraction of [Christmas dinner] in books in the U.S. and U.K.

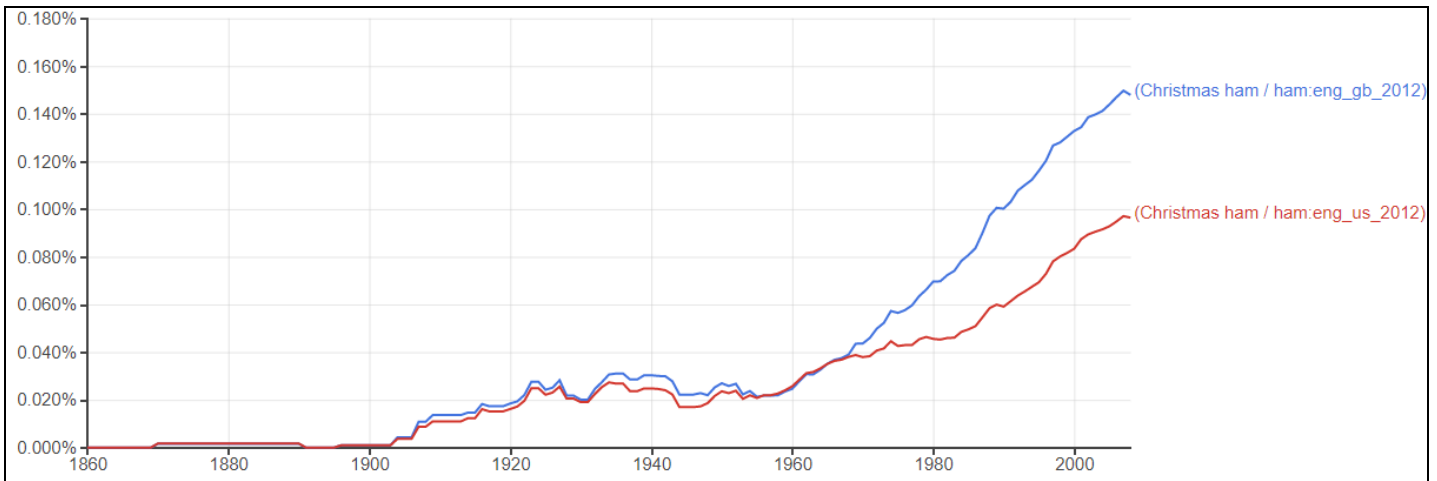


Figure 2. Results of a Google nGrams frequency analysis of [Christmas ham] as a fraction of [ham] in books in the U.S.

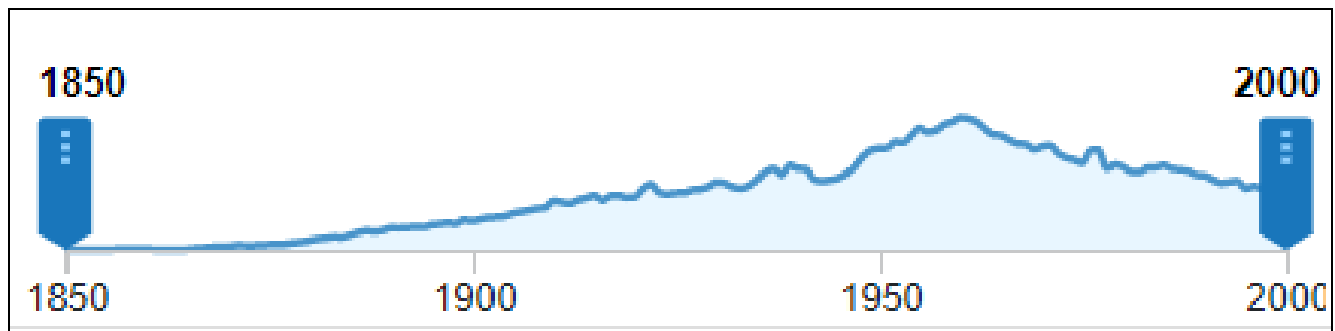


Figure 3. Results of a Newspapers.com search for [Christmas ham] in U.S. Newspapers.



## CHRISTMAS HAM *continued from page 6*

and “Westphalia Ham, Champagne Sauce”. The remaining 7 names are not specific, but likewise suggest ham that is probably not glazed: “Smithfield ham”, “Ham”, “St. Louis Ham”, “Dupee Ham and Spinach”, “Broiled Ham”, “Corn Cured Ham and Fresh Greens”, and “Virginia Ham Stuffed”.

Magazine articles about Christmas fare in the U.S. and other English-speaking countries around the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century rarely mention ham: it is turkey that is that standard centerpiece, or occasionally a Dickensian goose (Knapp 1890; Johnson 1893; Anonymous 1905; Gibson 1906).

Cookbooks might seem like a good source for Christmas ham, but, although many 19<sup>th</sup>-Century books *other than cookbooks* mention Christmas ham, recipes in cookbooks are scarce. That is, a Christmas ham is simply a ham served at Christmas, not the name of a particular style of preparation.

One of the few recipes specifically for Christmas ham is in *The Practical Housewife* (Philp 1855, p. 112), published in London: the ham is soaked, washed, boiled, covered with flour-and-water paste, and baked. The paste is then removed, and the ham is served covered with bread crumbs. This sort of treatment is common for all 19<sup>th</sup>-Century ham recipes: the ham is poached for many hours, often wrapped in cloth, before being baked.

So, nothing like our modern Christmas ham.

### Glazes Turned Sweet in the 1890s

On the other hand, there are certainly recipes for glazed ham. A 1938 edition of Thomas Jefferson’s cookbook suggested sprinkling ham with sugar before “set[ting] it under a broiler” [*sic!*] (Kimball, 1938); but that edition is unreliable, so it might reflect 1930s practices (Hess, 1977). The French royal chef Viard glazed a ham with concentrated meat stock (Viard 1820, p. 197), as did Mrs. Beeton in England (Beeton 1862, p. 206). An 1852 English novel quoted a “Jambon Glacé à l’ananas” (ham glazed with pineapple) on a menu in the *entremets* course, but of course gives no recipe (Smith 1852, p. 68). A recipe in a Philadelphia magazine glazed a ham with egg yolks and cracker crumbs (Anonymous, 1854), and an 1879 compilation from Virginia included a pair of recipes in which white or brown sugar was used as an ingredient in the stuffing or coating of a boiled, cured ham, but the quantities of sugar were fairly modest (Tyree 1879, p. 128). Again, none of these recipes resemble the glazed Christmas ham that is familiar today.

So until the late-19<sup>th</sup> Century, it appears that “glazed” ham was mostly glazed (*glacé*) with concentrated *stock* (*glace de viande*) and not with sugar.

It is only during the 1880s that I begin to regularly find heavily sweetened glazed hams. An 1884 and an 1899 recipe, published in Philadelphia and Toronto, respectively, called for fully ½ pound sugar for a 16-pound ham (Anonymous 1884, p. 88; Clark 1899, p. 66) (see Fig. 4 in next column). And in 1896, Fannie Farmer sprinkled the ham with sugar and cracker crumbs, and stuck it with cloves a half-inch apart (Farmer 1896, p. 210). A recipe in *The “Settlement” Cook Book*, which aimed to help

**Baked Ham.**—A ham of sixteen pounds must be boiled three hours, then skin and rub in half a pound of brown sugar, cover with bread-crumbs, and bake well for two hours.

**Glazed Ham.**—Take a cold-boiled ham from which the skin has been removed, and brush it well all over with beaten egg. To a cup of powdered cracker allow enough rich milk or cream to make into a thick paste, salt it, and work in a teaspoonful of melted butter. Spread this evenly, a quarter of an inch thick, over the ham, and set to brown in a moderate oven.

Figure 4. These two consecutive recipes from a Philadelphia cookbook, *The Latest and Best Cook Book* (Anonymous 1884, p. 88), illustrate how American ham preferences took a turn toward sweetness in the 1880s. The more traditional Glazed Ham is skinned and covered with an egg-and-crumbs coating before being browned in the oven, while pride of place goes to a Baked Ham that is skinned and given a sweet rub of brown sugar and bread crumbs before baking.

assimilate U.S. immigrant women, coated the ham with ½ *inch* (!) of sugar, then added more sugar (Kander 1915, p. 129). And a 1919 institutional recipe called for 2 pounds of sugar for a 16-pound ham (Smedley 1919, p. 142). In the 1930s, the Chicago-based Armour and Co. called its cure “Fixed Flavor” or “Double F”, and suggested recipes in a brochure distributed through butchers, “60 Ways to Serve Armour’s Star Ham”. The centerfold (Armour 1930, pp. 14-15) portrayed a sugar-glazed, diamond-hatched baked ham studded with cloves (see Fig. 5 on next page). Overall, the pamphlet included fruit or sugar in 8 out of the 12 recipes for whole hams.

In 1937 and 1940, we find *honey-glazed* hams being promoted by the American Honey Institute and a magazine for honey producers. Here, the fat is scored in diamonds and studded with cloves (Cranston 1937). Relatedly, what evolved into The Honey Baked Ham Company began in the 1930s as an enterprise selling bone-in honey-glazed hams to drugstores in Detroit, where it was sliced and served at lunch counters.

### New Processing and Marketing for a Holiday Specialty

But when do these sweet hams become *Christmas* hams? It turns out that a parallel development in the processing and marketing of ham is responsible for that.

Not long after heavily sweetened hams started becoming common, there was a revolution in ham processing. Previously, hams took two to three months to cure, and were so heavily salted and smoked that they could be stored for years. But during the first decades of the 1900s, industrial meat packers created new, fast-curing techniques that increased production and lowered costs (Horowitz 2006, pp. 56ff.). In a 1906 advertisement, a Black “chef” praised Armour’s “Star” ham as never having a salt-pork taste: it is cured in Armour’s ‘Epicured’ liquor with just enough sugar, pure saltpetre, and a small amount of salt to bring out the full flavor without salt-pickling “like





Figure 5. “Baked Ham with Pineapple” is an illustration from the centerfold of the pamphlet “60 Ways to Serve Armour’s Star Ham”, ca. 1930. Reproduced by permission of Smithfield Foods, Inc.

common hams” (Armour, 1906; I have paraphrased the original verbiage, which was written in an offensive caricature of Black English).

These new “mild cure” hams needed less boiling to extract the salt, and were claimed to be more tender and juicy. Armour started promoting these new mild hams as “holiday ham” for the “Yule-tide season” in advertising in 1916 (see Fig. 6 at right).

Canned ham was introduced in the 1920s, and became popular in the 1950s (Google nGrams). Canned ham is pre-cooked and can be baked without a preliminary boiling step, making it much quicker and easier to prepare.

The origins of today’s sweet-glazed Christmas ham, then, lie not in ancient Scandinavian traditions, or even in colonial cooking, but rather at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, when industrial ham production was accompanied by systematic promotion of sugar-glazed ham for Christmas by the ham industry. Although sugar-glazed ham predates these promotions, the new milder-flavored, less-salty ham lent itself well to these recipes. Later in the century, precooked, ready-to-eat canned ham made it even easier to prepare glazed baked ham, contributing to the growing popularity of Christmas or holiday ham.

**Acknowledgements:** My thanks to Barbara Santich for first posting the question about the origin of the American Christmas ham, and for supplying many useful leads, to Randy Schwartz for additional information and encouragement, and to Robin Fleming for helpful discussions and comments. ■

*Bibliography on next page*



Figure 6. A holiday ad (Armour 1916, p. 51) promises that Armour’s Star Ham will arrive at the table “juicy, savory, tender and sweet”, thanks to a mild-cure technology whereby the ham has been smoked inside a stretch-fabric covering called Stockinet (“An Exclusive Armour Feature; Patent applied for”).

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**PHILLY LARDER** *continued from page 3*

- whipped syllabub, of Cornish origin, a dessert of cream curdled with wine or fruit juice
- Philadelphia pepper pot, a stew of beef tripe, vegetables, and Jamaican seasonings
- Quarterly meeting pie (1851), a potato pudding frequently served at Quaker quarterly meeting dinners
- pepper hash (1855), a pickled relish of bell peppers and red cabbage
- scrapple (*pannhaas*), a Pennsylvania German pan-fried breakfast mush of pork scraps, cornmeal, and spices
- dandelion and scallion salad
- Philadelphia fried oysters
- terrapin
- gooseberry marmalade
- chicken croquettes (1890), in a recipe developed by successful Black caterer Peter Augustine
- Indian stew of tomatoes (1897), spiced with cayenne pepper, ginger, and turmeric.

**CHAA PROGRAMS** *continued from page 5*

"the milk of human kindness"), although most of the recipes were literal ones. Kumin's book reproduces many of them (accompanied by her modern adaptations): Gingerbread, Sally Lunn Cakes, Emergency Salad, Taco Salad, and more. In sympathy with the temperance movement, the recipes generally avoided alcohol-based ingredients. They reflected other trends of the day, including watered-down and Americanized dishes, and the use of foodstuffs promoted by the "domestic science" movement such as canned goods and corn-derived ingredients. The overwhelmingly white, well-to-do character of the suffragists also came through in such aspects as meal ideas with many, many courses.



## BOOK REVIEW



# A HASTINESS OF COOKS PROVES ITS USEFULNESS AND OFFERS CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

Cynthia D. Bertelsen,

*A Hastiness of Cooks: A Practical Handbook for Use in Deciphering the Mysteries of Historic Recipes and Cookbooks, for Living-History Reenactors, Historians, Writers, Chefs, Archaeologists, and, of Course, Cooks*

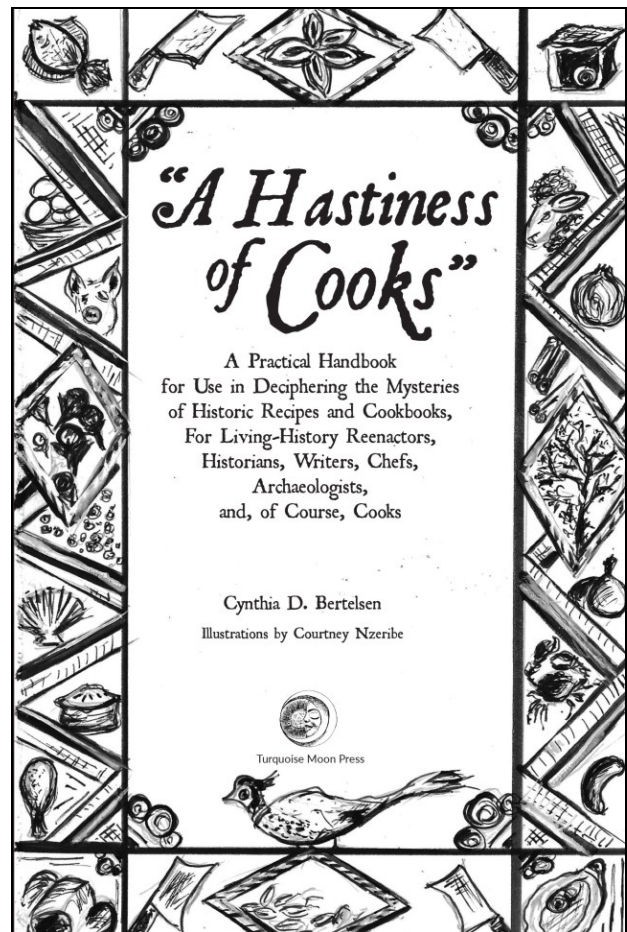
Gainesville, FL: Turquoise Moon Press, 2019

by Paul Vugteveen

Repast subscriber Paul Vugteveen is an independent chef and consultant in Kalamazoo, MI. As an innovative chef, trainer, and consultant he has led kitchens and other workplaces to incorporate local and seasonal produce, wild and foraged foods, vegan- and allergen-friendly menus, and perspectives of nutrition, health, environmental justice, and social equity. His experiences have included stints at Pierce Cedar Creek Institute in Hastings, MI, Zingerman's Bakehouse in Ann Arbor, Avalon International Breads in Detroit, JW Marriott in Grand Rapids, and Brines Farm in Dexter, MI.

Cynthia D. Bertelsen's *A Hastiness of Cooks* offers an accessible and tactile entry point into food history for anyone interested in cookbooks. Bertelsen begins by noting that the primary focus of the work is English and Spanish cookbooks. The inclusion of cookbooks from Spain is notable because (1) they have tended to be analyzed and studied to a lesser extent than those of other European countries, and (2) they show a significant Islamic influence. These observations hint at the understated critical perspective that appears throughout the book.

Bertelsen notes that the title phrase, "a hastiness of cooks", is one of the whimsical collective nouns that were devised in late medieval England, along with "a glossing of taverners" and many others. *A Hastiness of Cooks* moves through five parts, each with its own merit. Part I, "The Mysteries in Cookbooks", lays a foundation, providing necessary information and context that allows the reader to understand the importance of cookbooks in examining history as well as the culture out of which they were produced. It is here that Bertelsen demonstrates



how cookbooks contribute to a robust historical picture, yet have their own limitations because of the enormous difficulties involved in clarifying details of daily life for entire classes of people.

In Part II, "What's Past is Prologue", Bertelsen provides an overview of the history of European cookbooks wherein the reader is able to glimpse how they tend to reflect dominant cultural practices and beliefs. As she summarizes it, "cookbooks mirror the political and social climates surrounding their authors." She also is quick to acknowledge the upper-class male predominance among cookbook authors, who likewise represented the dominant religious beliefs of their time.

Bertelsen dives headfirst into the theory of cookbook analysis in Part III, "Theories Behind Historic Cookbook Analysis". This section aims to prepare the reader to do the work of researching and recreating historical recipes. By far, Part III is the most substantial part of the book with the most practical and useful content for the reader. Bertelsen again makes the case for the inclusion and analysis of Spanish cookbooks. In her articulation of the analysis process, Bertelsen points out that few people "have applied such analysis to cookbooks from cultures other than England, Italy, and France." Here, she also takes the opportunity to highlight the contributions of Dr. Maryellen Spencer for presenting a clear methodology in the study of cuisines when written material is non-existent, an important citation as it goes hand-in-hand with the author's tendency to subtly point out normative gender roles and oppression that are historically evident.

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## ***HASTINESS OF COOKS*** *continued from page 11*

Part III goes on to present a methodology for producing questions and seeking out their answers by subdividing the information in a cookbook into various components, such as equipment, ingredients, procedures, action words, and more. Bertelsen describes in detail potential complications not only in the analysis of a cookbook, but also in the selection and reconstruction of a particular recipe. Readers will be grateful to find that Bertelsen offers tools and resources to mitigate the challenges and to pave the way for success.

In Part IV, “The Practical: Recreating Historic Recipes”, Bertelsen provides 10 step-by-step examples of recipe re-creation, five from Spanish cookbooks and five from English. The examples are thorough, provide the original recipes along with the transcription and translation, and show clearly the application of the provided Step-By-Step Recipe Reconstruction Form which is found in the Appendix of the book. Each recipe also includes an entertaining “semi-fictitious snippet” serving to introduce the cookbook from which it is taken.

Part V, “Tools for Background Research”, provides the reader with a convincing case for bibliographies in general, and more specifically for their importance in relation to the work of historic cookbook analysis. It lays out practical bibliography-building suggestions. An extensive list of online tools is provided in this part of the book before the author leaves us a “final note”.

*A Hastiness of Cooks* initially appealed to me as a culinary professional and as someone who has examined my own culinary traditions, especially as a person of Dutch heritage. The approach to recipe reconstruction that Bertelsen offers is a refreshing contrast to the popular approach to recipes. The popular approach tends to debase the culinary skill and knowledge of a culture in the course of seeking to mine it for fast and easy recipes; such recipes typically lead to lackluster results. To help combat this tendency, Bertelsen emphasizes that early historical cookbooks omitted details that might have been part of the routine skill set of the original readers: cooking times, ingredient quantities, number of servings, and other things that are commonplace in recipes today. Through the prospect of recipe reconstruction, Bertelsen’s work gives me an opportunity to continue my personal culinary research, to develop kitchen mastery, and to connect with my ancestors in a tactile way.

On the social and cultural plane, it was a pleasant surprise to find Bertelsen hinting very early in the book that she might take a critical perspective, although she does so only in subtle ways. Throughout the work, she raises up the fact that cookbooks have historically contributed to the silencing of women and lower classes, the reinforcing of gender norms, and the influence of religious elites. Cookbooks have traditionally reinforced social norms and oppression by reflecting and disseminating the dominant misunderstandings that have prevailed. She points to this with regard to gender without expressing it explicitly.

She also stops short of offering an explicitly critical perspective regarding colonialism and race. Her book focuses on the cookbook histories of two European countries, England and Spain, that were among the foremost colonial powers in history. (This is true despite the fact that Spain itself had earlier been subject to domination by Arabic-speaking outsiders.) Bertelsen passively describes the Americas of Columbus’s “discovery” as

### **About Cynthia Bertelsen**

The writer and nutritionist Cynthia Bertelsen, of Gainesville, FL, is perhaps best known for “Gherkins and Tomatoes” (<http://gherkinstomatoes.com>), her acclaimed blog on food history and culture. Her background includes advanced degrees in human nutrition and foods, history, and library science. She honed her cooking skills in part during her years of living—often working as a nutritionist and food consultant—in Mexico, Paraguay, Haiti, Honduras, Morocco, Burkina Faso, and France. For many years she lived in Blacksburg, VA, where she chaired the Peacock-Harper Culinary History Friends group at Virginia Tech. Cindy has also been a member of the Southern Foodways Alliance and of the Culinary Historians groups in Washington, New York, and Ann Arbor. She contributed writing to the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America* and several periodicals, including an article on Time-Life’s “Foods of the World” series in *Repast* (Fall 2014). *A Hastiness of Cooks* won a Gourmand World Cookbook Award for 2020 in the Culinary History category. Since then, she has written and published two additional books via her Turquoise Moon Press: *Meatballs & Lefse: Memories and Recipes from a Scandinavian-American Farming Life* (2020) and *Wisdom Soaked in Palm Oil: Journeying through the Food and Flavors of Africa* (2020). Her book *Mushroom: A Global History* was published in 2013 as part of the Edible Series from Reaktion Books.

—RKS

an “unwelcoming and unforgiving land” and describes indigenous groups as “hostile”, but without identifying that the context was the intrusion of aggressive European powers into the hemisphere. Similarly, in discussing spices from Asia she makes no mention of the spice trade itself and of enterprises such as the British and Dutch East India Companies, which established a precedent for the normalization of colonialism, global capitalism, and sometimes genocidal practices.

In discussing the historical context for recipe analysis and reconstruction, Bertelsen makes note of the recipe plagiarism that was common among early cookbook writers. This seems to me to be a missed opportunity to name the type of material theft—extraction—that colonialism has practiced throughout history, as well as the type of cultural theft—appropriation—that dominant European powers have tended to carry out against the rich culinary repertoires of people of color.

Despite these limitations, *A Hastiness of Cooks* is a thoroughly enjoyable read that left me eager to start again at researching my own cultural and culinary heritage in a more in-depth and methodical way. Although one of my criticisms is that the book is Eurocentric in nature, it does offer direct application to my analysis of Dutch culinary history. As a practitioner, I am able to find extensive usefulness in Bertelsen’s work both personally and professionally, despite being left to seek additional resources when working to decipher meaning in the context of colonialism.

The book has a wonderful balance of historical context and approachable practices with which the reader can engage. To make the most out of the experience, I implore readers to develop a critical awareness about food and food history, one that recognizes the past—and ongoing—harms of colonialism. ■



# A PRESERVED FINNISH FARMSTEAD IN UPPER MICHIGAN

text by Randy K. Schwartz, photos by Mariam van Deventer Breed

In July 2018 the two of us took a guided tour of the Hanka Homestead Finnish Museum, a well-preserved 40-acre immigrant farmstead that is located in a remote area near the hamlet of Askel in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Visitors there have a great opportunity to observe up-close the foodways and other cultural aspects of Finnish immigrant subsistence farming one century ago. In this photo story, we want to share much of what we saw and learned in our visit and in subsequent reading.



When Herman and Wilhelmina Hanka arrived in the U.S. with their four children in the 1880s, they were seeking greater economic opportunity while also fleeing memories of the famine of 1866-68, a Finnish national catastrophe. We were told that they settled first in North Dakota, but the couple—tenant farmers from Vaasa Province beside the Baltic Sea in western Finland—found the Great Plains topography alienating. By 1887 they had moved to the more familiar-looking forests and lakes of the Keweenaw, the northernmost promontory of the Upper Peninsula. Herman gained U.S. citizenship and found employment in Copper Country as a driller at the Quincy Mine in Calumet for a few years, until he was laid off following an explosion that left him maimed and deaf. After one or two false starts at farming in the area, in 1896 the family settled on an 80-acre plot near the base of the Keweenaw.

The Hankas' land, which they acquired under the Homestead Act of 1862, was marginal—full of stumps and debris left over after the area had been logged and the logs had been floated up the nearby Sturgeon River. But within one generation, the family turned this “stump farm” into a Finnish “home away from home” with 11 buildings of hewn timber, including a farmhouse and well, sauna and smokehouse, granary, root cellar, several barns, a dairy house and a chicken coop, plus a pond and an apple orchard. During the Winters, when farm chores would slacken and commercial logging

operations would surge in the area, the grown Hanka children often hired out to logging camps—including the eldest child, Maria, as a crew cook. The youngest son, Jalmer, who was in charge of the farm from 1923 until his death in 1966, never felt any ambition to improve or modernize the place; consequently, for those decades it remained frozen in time. In the early 1980s it opened to the public as a restored 1920s farmstead museum and was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

The Finnish cultural imprint on northern Michigan was and remains deep. From the 1860s to the 1920s, around 300,000 Finns emigrated to the U.S., mostly from western Finland. Nearly half of them settled in Michigan, the rest mostly in other Great Lakes states and in Canada. Because of chain migration spurred by mining and logging jobs, for decades Copper Country had the heaviest Finnish concentration of all. There, the immigrants formed self-contained enclaves where they were proud of their culture and self-reliance, and didn't become Americanized as quickly as some other groups. It wasn't necessary for them to learn English in order to thrive. In fact, our tour guide noted, Finnish reading and writing were taught in local public schools. A land agent once commented that “the only language the stumps understand in Upper Michigan is the Finnish language.”

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**FINNISH FARMSTEAD** *continued from page 13*



Every Finnish-American farmstead revolved around the kitchen— and the kitchen revolved around hot coffee! A hand-cranked burr-mill coffee grinder caught our attention on the counter of the Hoosier-style cabinet in the Hanka kitchen. We also spied the commercial vacuum-sealed can of Hills Bros. roasted coffee atop the cabinet; to the left, a wall-mounted holder for oven matches; and on the floor, a late-1800s plunge-type wooden butter churn of about five gallons.

Hoosier kitchen cabinets, many of them manufactured by firms in Indiana, were common from the late 1800s until World War 2, their popularity peaking in the 1920s. Conveniently centralizing many kitchen basics into a single piece of furniture, they boasted such features as extendable lower shelves and a pull-out counter so the cook could sit while working, as well as cabinets with built-in spice racks, menu planners, and bins and sifters for flour and sugar. For more on Hoosier cabinets, see the article in *Repast* by Nancy Hiller (2010).

Finnish people have led the world in coffee consumption levels for more than a century. For immigrant homesteaders in Michigan, strong black coffee at breakfast and during breaks from work was a source of physical and mental energy for the daily toils of farm life. Further, the beverage had a central role in social life and as a marker of Finnish identity and Christian morality. The Hanka family, who were devout Lutherans, enjoyed the ritual of drinking coffee inside church every Sunday and at church-sponsored “coffee socials” during the year. On Sunday mornings after church service, it was also a ritual for

Finnish immigrant women to gather at each other’s homes to chat over cups of hot coffee and freshly baked coffee cake, of which there are several varieties. Manuals for Finnish housewives gave instructions on how to organize such gatherings, from sending the invitations and baking the cakes, to setting the table and brewing and serving the coffee. For more about Finnish coffee customs in northern Michigan, see the paper by CHAA member Yvonne Lockwood (2012).

We were impressed by the collection of Ball canning jars that sat on the pantry shelves alongside cans of commercial lard, several coffee pots, and other items. The jars reminded us of the importance of food preservation on farmsteads, especially those lacking refrigeration. To make foods last through the long Winter months, the Hanka women would pack the prepared garden vegetables or fruits into glass pickling jars, along with salt, vinegar, sugar, syrup, and/or seasonings (according to the item), then gave the jars a hot-water bath on the stove to seal them and to start the preserving action. (For more on the Ball Brothers Co., established in Muncie, IN in 1887, see the article in *Repast* by Deanna Pucciarelli [2018].) Meats and offal could be ground up and turned into sausage, while chicken eggs or cattle tripe could be pickled as delicacies. Many local types of white fish could also be pickled: the fish was fileted and cut up, soaked in a salt-vinegar brine to extract moisture and dissolve any remaining bones, then put up in jars with a pickling juice of water, vinegar, sugar, and spices. As an alternative, fish could be dried and then pickled in lye to make Finnish *lipeäkala*, similar to Swedish *lutfisk*. Drying, smoking, fermenting, and root-cellarling of foods were also farmstead mainstays and are discussed on the remaining pages.





The Hanka women cooked with this sturdy, wood-burning, cast-iron kitchen range manufactured by the Peninsular Stove Co. of Detroit around the turn of the century. This model incorporates a firebox (lower left), a porcelain-clad cooking oven (lower right), and a stovetop with six circular, lidded openings. We noticed that on the two overhead warming ovens, the brand logos proclaim “Guaranteed the Best”; Peninsular, founded in 1881, was one of the Big Three firms in stove making in Detroit, a city that for a few decades was the world’s leader in that industry. We also saw, at the upper right, a fire poker and a kitchen ladle sharing a wall hook, and above them, two woolen socks hanging on pegs, as if drying in the kitchen heat. At the time of our tour, a shiny metal kettle and a white vitreous-enamel coffee pot sat on the stovetop alongside a pair of heating irons. A pump elsewhere in the kitchen is used to lift water from the well, just outside.

Using the range required a lot of know-how, and there was an incessant duty to procure firewood. The firebox is large enough to accommodate medium-sized logs, which took a year to dry. Finns esteemed birch as the best fuel for cookstoves. The wider the cook opens the firebox vents, the hotter the fire gets. Back in the day, there were no temperature dials or cooking thermometers, so Finnish cooks and cookbooks used such terms as “quiet fire” (*hiljainen walkia*), “weak fire” (*heikko walkia*), “visible fire” (*ilmi walkia*), and “strong heat” (*wäkewä lämpö*). The cook knew from experience how the temperature on her stovetop varied with distance from the firebox. When she placed anything in the oven, the temperature would drop and she knew how to compensate by some combination of new fuel and widened vents. If it got too hot, she narrowed the vents, and possibly opened the oven door for a moment. To grill, she could remove one of the stovetop lids (see the curvy tool in the photo, hanging beside the near corner of the range) and replace it with a metal grate. Cast-iron ranges are very prone to rusting and pitting, so she had to regularly clean off the rust and food residues and “re-season” with cooking oil, as with a cast-iron saucepan. For more on the care and use of an old cast-iron range such as this one, see the how-to piece that an Upper Peninsula resident contributed anonymously to *Countryside* magazine (1998).

The most basic foods made in the Hanka kitchen included a stovetop *puuro* (porridge) of rice, rye, oats or other grains cooked in milk or water, and oven-baked flatbread or loaf bread (*leipä*). For special occasions there were baked sweets made with wheat flour, such as fruit pies or *pähkinäleipä*, a log-shaped butter cookie with chopped nuts. Preserving a Finnish tradition, coffee cake was usually baked on Saturday so that it would be fresh for the Sunday coffee ritual. The most popular variety was *nisu*, which is moist and rich, not light and fluffy like many American coffee cakes. The wheaten dough is leavened with yeast and beaten eggs, flavored with crushed cardamom seeds and sugar, formed into a braided loaf (*pitko*) or a smaller brioche shape, and glazed before baking. Stale leftover *nisu* was often re-baked into breadsticks (*korppu*) used for dunking in coffee. The term *nisu* is a linguistic holdover: it was an old Finnish word for “wheat” that came to also refer to this type of bread loaf. In Finland itself, the word *nisu* fell out of favor— both for wheat (now called *vehnä*) and for this bread (*pulla*)— but among Finnish descendants in Canada and the Great Lakes region, the bread is often still called *nisu*. This linguistic holdover hints that there might also be culinary holdovers from Finland, preserved in the New World by the Hankas and other immigrants.

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### *Nisu* (Finnish coffee bread)

*This recipe is from Nellie Lyle Pattinson, The Canadian Cookbook, Revised and Enlarged Edition of 1953 by Helen Wattie and Elinor Donaldson (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1959), p. 486. It appears in the “Prairie Provinces” section of the final chapter, “Regional Dishes”. This leading Canadian cookbook had first come out in 1923; cookbook scholar Elizabeth Driver has written that its Regional chapter, added in 1953, was “the first attempt by anyone to define regional cooking in a Canadian cookbook”.*

|                              |                           |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1½ cups milk                 | 1 tsp. sugar              |
| 3 eggs                       | 7½ cups all-purpose flour |
| 1 cup sugar                  | ¼ lb. butter              |
| 1 package dry granular yeast | 6 cardamom pods           |
| ½ cup water                  | ¼ tsp. salt               |

Shell the cardamom pods and crush the tiny black seeds by placing them in a cloth and pounding fine.

Follow the directions on the package of yeast, using the sugar and water specified there.

Beat the eggs and sugar in a bowl until fluffy. Heat the milk to lukewarm, and add it to the egg-sugar mixture. Add enough flour to the bowl to make a smooth paste. Add yeast; beat well until foamy. Mix into the bowl the crushed cardamom, the rest of the flour and, last, the softened butter.

Knead the dough on a flat surface until smooth and elastic. Roll it into a greased bowl, and let it rise in a warm, moist place. (A closed, warm cupboard containing a large bowl of boiling water may be used for this purpose.)

When double in bulk, cut the dough into pieces and let them rest. Shape as desired into buns, coffee rings, etc. Let rise again.

Brush with slightly beaten egg. Bake at 375° F.

**FINNISH FARMSTEAD** *continued from page 15*



To keep the family’s grain harvests dry and safe from vermin, we were told, it was stored on the second floor of this *aitta* (granary). Just as in Finland, rye was grown here and was the most widely used grain in the kitchen, while oats were grown mostly for a horse and cattle. The Hankas and other people of western Finland— which was historically heavily influenced by Swedish culture— would use their rye flour to bake mass quantities of coarse, dark, unsweetened, round flatbreads, each with a hole in the center so that the loaves could be strung on poles in the *aitta* to be dried and preserved. This was a means to economize on wood fuel for the oven and to assure a year-round supply of bread— albeit hard, tough loaves of bread. By contrast, in eastern Finland— which was historically heavily influenced by Russian culture and where wood-burning domestic ovens were more common— housewives baked fat, fresh loaves of the dark rye bread year-round (weekly or even daily), and poked fun at the dry “teeth-cracking bread” of the westerners.

Many traditional Finnish dishes now made with wheat flour were formerly made with rye, and many stews now routinely made on stovetops were most likely oven-baked by the Hankas and other early immigrants. Important examples include *pannukakku* or *kropsu*, which are oven-baked pancakes; *kalakukko*, a fish pie baked in a rye crust; *piirakka*, a meat pie, also baked in a rye crust; and *kalamojakka*, a fish and potato stew. (This last term is used only in North America; *kala* means “fish” in Finnish, but the etymology of *mojakka* is unknown.) Normally made with wheaten dough today, the famous baked meat-pie turnover of the Upper Peninsula— and its name, “pasty”— was borrowed from earlier Cornish immigrants by the Finns, although it bears a resemblance to their own rye *piirakka*. For more on the pasty, see the essay by Yvonne Lockwood and the late William Lockwood (1998).

Twice every day, the Hanka women went out to the cow barn to hand-milk the family’s two or three lactating Jerseys. The filled cans were then brought to this dairy house (*maitokauppa*), where they were immersed in a cool spring flowing below the wood-plank floor. The contraption with a hand crank in the photo below is a manual separator, a centrifuge used to separate cream from the rest of the milk, thus its pair of spouts; the resulting “skimmed milk” is still edible by people or livestock, and the cream can be used as-is or made into butter or other dairy products. This specimen from around 1918 is model No. 14 from the De Laval Separator Co. of New York, the U.S. subsidiary of Gustaf de Laval’s pioneering firm in Sweden.



Traditionally, dairy products were second only to bread as the leading food staples among Finns. The Hankas routinely incorporated their own milk, cultured milk, or butter into dishes such as soups, stews, porridges, breads, and desserts. Distinctively Finnish dairy products that they made on the farm include *viiili* (pronounced like “feely”), which is whole milk fermented at room temperature by adding a spoonful of the previous batch, and which has a texture more creamy and stringy than that of yoghurt; *piimä*, which is similar to *viiili* but thin enough to be drinkable; and *juusto* (pronounced like “you-stah”), a curd cheese of western Finland, made by adding rennet to the sweet, rich milk of a cow that has just calved (this cheese is often then baked in the oven as a special treat). For more about such products, see the *Repast* article by the Lockwoods (2009).





We poked our heads inside another Hanka farm outbuilding, the family smoke sauna (*savusauna*), where they smoked fish, game meat, and possibly pork over wood fires. It was also used for their weekly Saturday sauna baths, which are esteemed in Finnish culture as physically and spiritually restorative. For this, the rockpile (*kiuas*) was heated for 6-8 hours, then the fire was put out and the smoke was let out of the building; the rockpile would continue to emit heat for as long as 12 hours. For more about the operation of a smoke sauna, see the article by Vösu and Sooväli-Sepping (2012).



Smoking meats to preserve them is yet another example of the methods used by Finnish immigrant farmers to live off of the land frugally. The self-sufficiency of both family and community was an economic expedient and a point of pride. Besides the produce from their cropland, garden, and apple orchard, the Hankas secured fresh milk from their cow barn (*pauna*), and fresh eggs and meat from their chicken coop (*kanakoppi*). They hunted rabbits, partridges, and deer, and did trapping and tanning as well. They fished with a gill net in the Sturgeon River about a kilometer away, and with fishing poles in smaller streams and in lakes and ponds. Smelts, lake whitefish (also known as “lake herring” or “cisco”), and trout are abundant in the area, and the immigrants found them more or less acceptable as substitutes for Old World herring (*silli*), European whitefish (*siikaa*), and salmon (*lohi*) for many purposes, such as the fish pies and stews mentioned earlier.

Foods seasonally gathered in the wild by Finnish immigrants included mushrooms; chives and other herbs; wild berries such as the strawberry, thimbleberry, blueberry, and juniper berry; and certain edible lichens, mosses, and barks. As for the few essentials or indulgences that the farmers couldn't produce themselves, a neighbor would visit town every Saturday to shop for the neighborhood, buying supplies such as sugar, coffee, oil, vinegar, salt, pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, and rice, and perhaps some canned specialties imported from Europe such as smoked sardines and salted herring. Salted herring filets could be combined with chopped eggs, *piimä* cream, and dill and other seasonings to make *sillikaviaari* (herring “caviar”), which is delicious on bread.

*continued on next page*

## Kalakukko (Finnish Fish Pâté)

*From Beatrice A. Ojakangas, Scandinavian Cooking (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1983; first published in 1964), pp. 172-173.*

This bacon-flavored fish pie tastes best when served warm. In our recipe, it is made with pike or perch because of their availability. Kalakukko look like plump, round loaves of rye bread. The thick rye crust acts almost as a casserole dish enclosing the filling.

Makes 4 dinner servings or 8 snack or appetizer servings.

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| 1½ lbs. small pike, perch, or trout, fresh or frozen | ½ cup butter  |
| rye crust (see below)                                | ½ cup water   |
| 1 tsp. salt  | melted butter |
| ½ lb. sliced bacon                                   | lemon wedges  |

### For the rye crust:

|                              |                        |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| 4 cups stirred rye flour     | 2 cups warm water      |
| ½ to 1 cup all-purpose flour | 2 Tbsp. butter, melted |
| 2 tsp. salt                  |                        |

Thaw frozen fish. Clean fish, removing entrails, head, tail, and scales. It is not necessary to remove skin and bones.

Prepare rye crust (see below).

Stack half of fish onto center of dough, leaving 4 inches on all sides uncovered. Sprinkle with ½ teaspoon salt. Top with bacon. Add remaining fish and salt. Fold sides of dough to center, over filling. Moisten edges slightly with water; pinch edges to seal. Preheat oven to 300° F. (150° C.).

To prepare glaze, heat butter and water in a small saucepan over medium heat until butter melts.

Grease a large baking sheet with raised sides. Place filled crust on center of sheet. Brush surface of pie with butter-and-water glaze. Make a 1½-inch slash in top of crust. Bake 1½ hours, brushing occasionally with glaze.

Cut a piece of foil large enough to enclose pie. Place baked pie on foil; wrap airtight. Return wrapped pie to baking sheet; bake 3 hours longer. Turn off oven; leave pie in oven 2 hours longer or until oven has cooled. This will soften crust.

To serve, slice crosswise, or cut a 3-inch oval in the top of the crust and scoop out filling. Serve hot, warm, or cold. Spoon melted butter over filling, followed by lemon juice squeezed from the wedges. Break off pieces of crust to serve with filling.

### Rye Crust

In a large bowl, combine rye flour, ¼ cup all-purpose flour, and salt. Stir in water, then butter. Add enough all-purpose flour to make a stiff dough. Turn dough out onto a board lightly sprinkled with rye flour. Knead until smooth; dough will feel similar to clay. Roll out dough to a 14-inch square, about ½ inch thick.

**FINNISH FARMSTEAD** *continued from page 17*

We also poked our heads into the root cellar (*maakellari*), which the Hankas dug out from their land in about 1902 for storing harvests such as root vegetables, apples, and smoked meat. Like other farm families in Finland and in northern Michigan, they relied heavily on root crops for most of the year due to the short growing season. We were shown a potato planter and a rutabaga planter on the ground floor of the granary alongside the plows and other farming implements, fishing poles, animal traps, and the like. The family also grew turnips, beets, carrots, and onions. When it comes to such vegetables, Finnish preferences are captured well in this humorous passage from a story set in the Upper Peninsula:

The proper way to cook a vegetable, said Heikki, was for a long time in a lot of water. Then he drained it and greased it up with thick slabs of butter and sprinkled it liberally with salt and pepper. Today there are crazy people out who spice their foods with garlic and hot pepper, and a whole slough of other condiments. Heikki thought these people should not be allowed across the Mackinac Bridge [the bridge to the Upper Peninsula] (Anderson, 1995).

Besides root crops, Finnish farmers also grew some garden vegetables that were a little more perishable, such as cabbage and peas. These they often used in stovetop soups, or else baked in the oven as stews (casseroles) with the addition of barley or rice. Still other vegetables might be consumed raw, as in *kurkkusalaatti* (a fresh cucumber salad made with vinegar, sugar, and dill leaves) and *kevatsalaatti* ("Spring Salad", typically made with celery, apple, or other crispy ingredients). The apples on the Hanka farm were a Winter-hardy, early-ripening variety from Russia called Yellow Transparent, introduced to the North Country by the USDA in 1870. The fruit is crisp, juicy, and sweet, great for making baked dishes, apple sauce, or juice, but also for drying for Winter as per the northern European custom. ■

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# MORSELS & TIDBITS

Congratulations to **Anna Mae Grgich Anderson**, who contributed to our Spring 2020 issue with a foodways memoir, “A Croatian-American Family in Pittsburgh”. Most of the article was subsequently reprinted in the Nov. 25 issue of *Zajedničar* (Fraternalist), a bilingual, biweekly newspaper published since 1929 by the Croatian Fraternal Union of America, headquartered in Pittsburgh. The Spring 2020 issue of *Repast* was the third and concluding issue of our focus on the theme, “Immigrant Foods of Steel Country”.

**Margaret Carney**, CHAA member and the director of the International Museum of Dinnerware Design ([dinnerwaremuseum.org](http://dinnerwaremuseum.org)), tells us that judging was completed on schedule for the museum’s Fourth Biennial National Juried Exhibition, “Breakfast”. The exhibit will be installed at Ann Arbor’s Museum on Main Street in time for a virtual opening reception on Apr. 10, which will be recorded for social media. Dr. Carney reports, “There is some great work in the juried show in addition to the Invitational portion AND the historical or vintage work. It will be great fun!” One anticipated “happening” is the opening of a 60-year-old box of Rice Krispies—“We’ll see if the cereal still goes Snap! Crackle! Pop! when milk is added”, Margaret quipped. She hopes for in-person visits to the exhibit whenever it is safe to do so before it closes on Aug. 28, 2021.

Video recordings of all sessions from “**Food and the Book: 1300-1800**” can be freely viewed on YouTube. Organized last October by the Newberry Library (Chicago), the Folger Institute (Washington), and others, this online conference explored European and indigenous food customs as reflected in books from the Renaissance and Early Modern periods. A few of the sessions were: “European Views on Indigenous American Foods”, “Race and Food in the Early Modern Book”, and “Material Kitchens and the Social Life of Early Modern Food”. On the conference’s homepage (<https://www.newberry.org/10022020-food-and-book-1300-1800>), click on any session title to access the recording.

Materials are also freely available from the Fifth Biennial **Dublin Gastronomy Symposium**, “Food and Disruption: What Shall We Eat Tomorrow?”, organized May 26-27, 2020 by the School of Culinary Arts & Food Technology at the Dublin Institute of Technology. A few talks at this online conference were: “Neither Here Nor There: A Note on Two Memoirs by Sephardic Egyptian Women”, “Italian Soldiers in WWI and the Emergence of a National Culinary Identity”, and “How Indian Vegetarianism Disrupted the Way the World Eats”. Intrigued? On the conference’s homepage (<https://arrow.tudublin.ie/dgs/2020>), click on “Keynote speeches and recorded sessions” to gain access to the video recordings. Below that, click on any session title to gain access to the presented papers themselves.

The **Sophie Coe Prize** is a prestigious international prize awarded each year to an engaging, original piece of writing that delivers new research and/or new insights into any aspect of food history. The Prize is £1,500 for the winning essay, article, or book chapter (10,000 words or less). The deadline this year is Apr. 23, 2021. For background and further instructions, see <https://sophiecoeprize.wordpress.com>. ■

## The Years 1870 and 1871 Were Very Fruitful!

The years 2020-21 mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of several red-letter dates in the history of producing and distributing fruits in North America:

- In 1870 Allan McIntosh, a farmer of Scots-Canadian heritage in Matilda Twp., Ontario, established the first commercial nursery for trees of the McIntosh Red apple variety. They were descended from a single seedling that his father had discovered 59 years earlier growing in brush on the farm. Over time, the firm and juicy “Mac” became the national apple of Canada and also the leading variety in New England and eastern New York.
- In that same year, in the coldest parts of Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and the Dakotas, the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture introduced about 300 varieties of hardy apple trees from Russia. They included the Red Astrachan, Yellow Transparent, Alexander, Duchess of Oldenburg, and Lowland Raspberry.
- Also in 1870 the Kelsey, a domesticated Japanese variety of the Chinese plum (*Prunus salicina*), was introduced to the Santa Clara Valley. With subsequent improvements by horticulturalist Luther Burbank, this and other Japanese cultivars formed the basis for the modern plum industry in California. The next year, the avocado was first successfully grown in the state when Robert Brent Ord, a lower-court justice in Santa Barbara, brought three saplings of the exotic tree back from a trip to Mexico and planted them at his home.
- Meanwhile, commercial production of citrus was getting underway in Florida, beginning in 1870 at James Armstrong Harris’s orange grove on the shores of Orange Lake south of Gainesville. Mandarins followed the next year, at Col. George L. Dancy’s plantation in Orange Mills, on the St. John’s River southwest of St. Augustine. Because of its reputed origins in Tangiers, Morocco, the Dancy mandarin was nicknamed “tangerine”.
- The first large-scale importation of bananas from the Caribbean also got underway. The fruit had become popular in the East after 1850, when gold prospectors returning home from California spread word of the imported bananas that they’d enjoyed there. It was in 1870-71 that an enterprising fishing captain in Wellfleet, MA, Lorenzo Dow Baker, started using his two-masted schooner to bring crates of bananas from Jamaica to the ports of Boston and Jersey City, NJ. The shipments were a sensation, and over time the Yankee cravings for imported bananas, sugar, and coffee would reshape social and political life in the Caribbean and Central America.

More than a decade ago, *Repast* published a “Fruits of the Earth” issue (Summer 2009) with articles about apples, citrus, and bananas, certainly some of the most popular fruits in the history of the American shopping bag. Next year, however, we are planning to cover some fruits that are less common, such as the prickly pear, damson plum, persimmon, paw paw, mayhaw, melons, and dates. Stay tuned— those issues should be very juicy!

# CHAA CALENDAR

*During the pandemic, programs are being held virtually via Zoom starting at 4:00 p.m.*

**Sunday, February 21, 2021**

Food historian, educator, and author Linda Civitello,  
“Baking Powder Wars: The Cutthroat  
Food Fight That Revolutionized Cooking”

**Sunday, March 21, 2021**

Food historian Jennifer Pagano,  
“Creating *Sunset* Magazine’s Cooking Department:  
A Study of Men, Women and Cooking in the 1930s”

**Sunday, April 18, 2021**

Food historian and author Adrian E. Miller,  
“Black Smoke: African Americans and  
the United States of Barbecue”

**On the Back Burner:** We welcome ideas and submissions from all readers of *Repast*, including for the following planned future issues. Suggestions for future themes are also welcome.

- Spring and Summer 2021: Culinary History in England, Parts 2-3
- Fall 2021, Winter 2022: unthemed
- Spring and Summer 2022: Fruits of the World and How to Use Them

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*First Class*