



VOLUME XXVIII, NUMBER 1 WINTER 2012

# Repast

Quarterly Publication of the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor



## Food Customs of India

### Part 1

A confectioner at work inside Bhim Chandra Nag, a sweet shop in Kolkata, India that dates back almost 200 years.

Photo by Michael Krondl.

C.H.A.A. PROGRAM SUMMARY

# SOMETHING WAS BREWING IN OUR TALKS LAST FALL

For more than a decade **David Strauss**, an emeritus professor of history at Kalamazoo College, has been researching the internationalization of American foodways and the rise of gastronomy in the U.S. His new book is *Setting the Table for Julia Child: Gourmet Dining in America, 1934-1961* (Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2011). One of the key episodes in this culinary revolution was the subject of his talk on Sep. 18, “The Early Years of *Gourmet: The Magazine of Good Living*”. He explained to us how *Gourmet* was able to survive the war years, even though it stood outside the U.S. cultural mainstream when it was started in Jan. 1941. Its championing of taste, rather than nutrition or convenience, as the key criterion in appreciating food resonated with the literate public. H. L. Mencken had sounded this theme earlier in his *American Mercury* magazine, lambasting hot dogs and other processed foods as part of his broader critique of American philistinism. Another positive factor was the growing interest in ethnic and international cuisine. Pearl V. Metzeltin, first editor of *Gourmet*, had written the influential *World Wide Cook Book: Menus and Recipes of 75 Nations* (1939), and the New York World’s Fair (1939-40) had brought foreign foods and chefs to the U.S., inspiring such rest-

aurants as Le Pavillon. With America’s entry into the war, *Gourmet* writers portrayed these impulses as part of a patriotic battle to save Western civilization; they compared the industrialization of food and nutrition to Nazi efficiency. The magazine leaned toward French provincial food, and many of the articles were written in a travelogue style. But the most popular feature was Samuel Chamberlain’s “Clémentine in the Kitchen”, a regular column that told the story of a French cook’s efforts to transfer her food traditions from Senlis, in Burgundy, to Marblehead, in Massachusetts. The magazine thrived, reaching 30,000 subscribers in 1945.

Ann Arbor microbiologist **Roger Brideau** brews award-winning beer at home with his wife, Vickie, for personal use and for gifts. As a sort of Oktoberfest celebration, he spoke on “The History of the Microbrewery Beer Industry in Michigan” on Oct. 18. A plethora of local small-scale brewers existed in Michigan in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, he told us. What would become the Grand Rapids Brewing Co., for example, got its start way back in 1838. But in the 1900s, the number of local brewers in the state dwindled to about 120, due to the effects of Prohibition and the industry’s increasing reliance on technology (filtration, pasteurization, refrigerated railcars, and bottling). The trend reversed again with the rise of microbreweries and brewpubs, facilitated by changing public attitudes toward the industrialization of food in the 1970s and an amendment to state law in 1993.

Roger also summarized how he and Vickie brew beer in their kitchen. They start by boiling malted barley extract with water for 3½ hours in a big sanitized stove-pot. Hops are added to “bitter” the flavor. In the last 5 minutes, they add a seaweed called Irish moss in order to coagulate proteins and remove them. The warm liquid, or *wort*, is chilled rapidly and strained, then treated with brewer’s yeast in two stages of 7-10 days each. The yeasts, which feed on the malt sugars, are responsible for the fermentation process, which produces alcohol and, in the subsequent conditioning period of 1-12 months, carbonation. The Brideaus also add a flavoring agent that they grind from Scottish peat-smoked barley.

Prof. **David J. Hancock**, whose book *Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste, 1640-1815* was reviewed in our Winter 2010 issue, addressed us on Nov. 20 on the topic, “America’s Wine: Madeira and the Culture of Drink in Washington’s World”. We learned that Madeira, imported from Portugal, was a favored wine among early genteel Americans such as George Washington. They considered its use medicinal as well as pleasurable, and an emblem of their social stature. There were manuals on how to store and drink the wine, and special household wine caves became a fad among wealthy colonists, beginning in the South. A wide range of costly appurtenances were available to impress one’s house guests: cellar bins and bin labels, earthenware wine jugs, fine glass bottles affixed with special seals (disks bearing the owner’s name), stemware wine glasses of graded sizes, decanters of silver or glass crystal, decanter labels, corkscrews, coolers, cisterns, etc.

*Madeira was also included in our December theme meal, which is reviewed on pages 13-19.* ■

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ISSN 1552-8863

Published quarterly by the  
Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor (CHAA)

<http://www.culinaryhistoriansannarbor.org>

An archive is available at <http://cooks.aadl.org/cooks/repast>

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# REMEMBERING GEORGE ESTABROOK

We in the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor were very saddened when we learned that our fellow member and friend, George Estabrook, passed away on November 24, 2011. He was 69, and died at his home in Ann Arbor following a courageous battle with prostate cancer. A memorial service was held on November 29 at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church.

Along with his second wife, Virginia Hutton Estabrook, George was a highly respected and well-liked member of CHAA. He began to collaborate with our group in late 2005 and then formally joined it in March 2007. Virginia tells us, "George really enjoyed being a member of the Culinary Historians and loved the dinner-y get-togethers. He was fascinated by the interplay of human culture, history, and biology that shapes what people eat and how it came to be." The couple especially liked participating in our semi-annual theme meals; the arrangement was that George would make main dishes, and Virginia would make desserts. In recent years, the couple had spent many months each year in Portugal studying the countryside together—the flora and fauna, history and archaeology and food.

George was a man of exceptionally broad interests and activities, from mathematics to the history of food and agriculture, from ecology and sustainable development to religion, music, and athletics. We will miss him dearly, but will also cherish his memory. His energetic life and his considerable wisdom were, and are, a gift to us.

## Food and Nutrition

George Frederick Estabrook was a longtime professor of botany at the University of Michigan, where he was a specialist in the diversity and evolution of plants, and a pioneer in applying quantitative techniques to taxonomy and other facets of the life sciences. His two basic courses were "How People Use Plants" and "Biology of Human Nutrition"; in the latter course, as many as 240 students would be in his class! He was a gifted educator, and in 1986 he received an award of Distinction for Outstanding Teaching at UM.

He also enjoyed volunteering to give presentations before non-specialist audiences. For example, on Martin Luther King, Jr., Day, when regular classes at UM are cancelled, he would give an annual public lecture on "The Roots of Soul Food", in which he analyzed traditional African American dishes for their nutritional profiles and their links to the diet of the slavery era. (See Robert Harrington's review in *Repast* Winter 2006.)

George is a good example of how people who have expertise in other fields can greatly assist culinary historians. For the CHAA, he gave illustrated talks on "The History of Citrus Fruit" (Jan. 2006) and "The Domestication and Spread

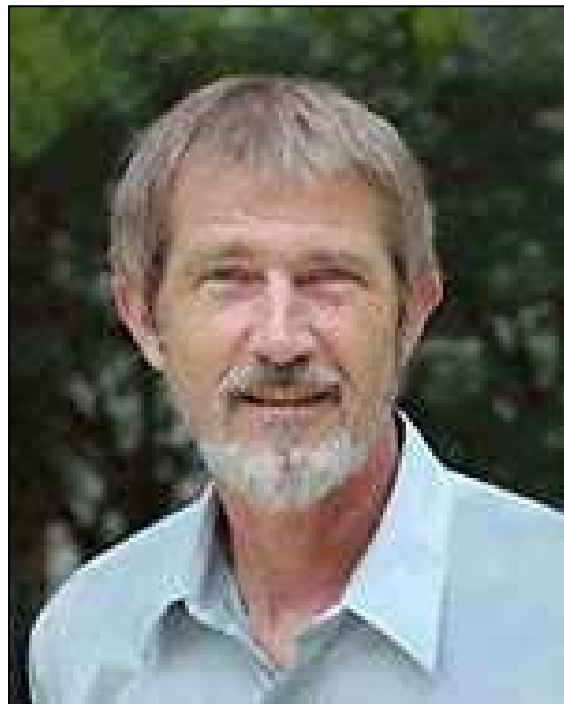


Photo courtesy of the Estabrook family.

of Bananas" (Jan. 2009). The texts of both talks were later published in *Repast* (Summer 2009) for the theme issue on "Fruits of the Earth". He also wrote "A Tart and Sweet History" (*Repast*, Summer 2008), which was a review of Pierre Laszlo's book, *Citrus: A History*. George's knowledge of the evolution and history of bananas, citrus, and other cultivated fruits resulted from work that he carried out with the Society for Economic Botany, for whose journal he had been serving as Senior Associate Editor in recent years.

In March 2007, right after joining our group, George responded to CHAA President Carroll Thomson's call for a rather unusual volunteer. He accepted the challenge to visit a local Montessori school and try to teach some food history to the children there. At the Go Like the Wind school in Dixboro, he enthralled two groups of first- through third-graders with his true stories about edible plants and their history. George later recounted, "For about 45 minutes each time, we talked about where in the world did some of our common fruits and vegetables originally come from, and where they were first cultivated before they were moved around the world by people." They covered the origin and spread of the orange (Indonesia), potato (South America), squash (North America), melon (Africa), cucumber (India), and grapefruit (Caribbean/Texas). The pupils were excited and had many comments and questions. The four teachers involved were highly appreciative, and later wrote to thank George again "for the wonderful presentation. You have amazing patience with children." Who knows, maybe he planted the seeds for some future-budding culinary historians that day?

## Studying Plants by Computer

Estabrook was born on November 1, 1942 in Carlisle, PA, where his father had briefly been stationed as a member

*continued on next page*

**GEORGE ESTABROOK** *continued from page 3*

of the U.S. Army Air Corps (later the Air Force). His parents were both from Massachusetts, and George thought of himself as a New Englander even though his family relocated every year or two, all over the U.S. and to Germany.

He attended Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, drawn by the school's reputation for real-world applications of mathematics and computer programming. All the while, he was also passionately interested in how plants grow. But Virginia recounts that in his biology courses, George quickly came to the conclusion that little of real substance was yet understood, and that most biologists functioned on the principle that, "If you can't understand it, name it." While he wasn't well suited to memorizing all the plant names and other details, he was able to use his outstanding grades in mathematics to offset his poor grades in biology!

After graduating from Dartmouth in 1964 with a B.A. in mathematics, George taught for one year at Franklin Pierce College (Rindge, NH), then lived for two years in New York City, where he was a Research Associate at the New York Botanical Garden. On the side, he sang tenor for the New York Oratorio Society. He had also taken up "old timey" banjo and was part of the early folk and coffeehouse scenes in the city.

He completed an M.A. program in mathematics in 1969 at the University of Colorado at Boulder, where he developed computer programs to reconstruct evolutionary trees for groups of species. He went on to develop a wide array of other techniques in mathematical biology, emerging as a key figure in this burgeoning field.

Interestingly, Estabrook never undertook a program of doctoral studies. By 1968, his journal articles had attracted the attention of faculty members at UM, and they invited him to come and present a guest lecture there. Impressed, they offered him a temporary position at the Herbarium beginning in 1970, and over time the post became permanent, much to his surprise. He was named a Research Scientist at the Herbarium in 1976, and a faculty appointment in the Dept. of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, eventually as Full Professor. During his career, he would author or co-author about 120 journal articles and reviews, and would chair the thesis committees for 16 Ph.D. biology students at UM.

#### Sustainable Agriculture: Learning from the Past

In the 1970s, George's life and work began to be influenced by the environmental movement and "green consciousness". In Ann Arbor, he sought out local and organic food, and distanced himself from reliance on motorized vehicles. He was famous for riding a brakeless, rickety bicycle year-round between his small Burns Park home and his office at the Nat Sci Building. The eventual theft of the bike in August 2007 was followed closely by the *Ann Arbor News*.

In the 1980s he became interested in the ecology of the countryside in Portugal, where he had been giving talks and doing research for many years. He spent Summers and sabbaticals at the University of Coimbra, serving as an Invited

Professor of Anthropology there and carrying out fieldwork on traditional agriculture in the remote mountainous interior.

In Portugal, Prof. Estabrook would observe and analyze centuries-old farming techniques to identify those practices that foster sustainability and that might be adaptable to more industrialized countries. For example, he studied how the fertility of shale soil is maintained by such traditional techniques as rotating food crops with *giesta* (a leguminous shrub), grazing sheep, and using living-grass ditches for irrigation. The professor learned to speak fluent Portuguese and, more impressively, the rural mountain dialect, so that he could talk with both farmers and scientists. Once, when an interviewer back at UM kept asking him how he was planning to "help" the Portuguese by teaching them what he knew, he made clear who was learning from whom: "I'm not there helping farmers at all. I'm there learning from farmers how they've managed to pull this off for the last 800 years."

It was around 2000 when George met Virginia E. Hutton, then a young UM doctoral student in biological anthropology specializing in paleoosteology. As the focus of her Ph.D. research, Virginia analyzed the bones found in collections of historical human skeletal remains in Portugal to learn about the medical and dietary consequences of the "Columbian exchange" between the Old and New Worlds after 1492.

The couple collaborated in their fieldwork and research in Portugal. To be able to spend more time there, they purchased an apartment in the town of Torres Vedras, in the west central region of Estremadura. Alongside their work, they also enjoyed observing the citrus harvest and sampling the excellent home-style food and local wine of the region. George hoped to write an article about these experiences for *Repast*, but it was in Portugal in March 2010 that he was diagnosed with late-stage prostate cancer. Sadly, aggressive medical treatment, there and later in the U.S., was unsuccessful.

He received hospice care, and kept up his church, music, and many other activities until the end. By his preference, he came home from hospice for his final few days to be surrounded by family. Before his passing, he was able to see a copy of his just-published book, *A Computational Approach to Statistical Argument in Ecology and Evolution* (Cambridge Univ. Press). This is a textbook based on his own ideas and techniques, which he taught in a statistics course that he developed for doctoral and post-doctoral students at UM.

Perhaps one day the techniques of mathematical biology, the discipline that George Estabrook helped to establish, might be used to defeat cancer and other natural scourges. He is survived by his first wife, Dr. Bronwen Gates, of Ann Arbor; their children, Edward, 34, of Vancouver, BC, Ruth, 32, of Ft. Lauderdale, FL, and George Frederick, Jr. ("Fred"), 31, of Ypsilanti, MI; his second wife, Dr. Virginia Hutton Estabrook, of Ann Arbor; and their two children, Elizabeth ("Lili"), 3, and Peter ("Pedro"), 1. The family requested that memorial donations be made to a program for people in need, "The Breakfast at St. Andrew's", 306 N. Division Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-1497. ■

# PUNJAB: A CULINARY MELTING POT

by Veronica Sidhu

*Univ. of Michigan alumna Veronica “Rani” Sidhu is a cookbook author, food writer, and cooking instructor in New York, and a member of the Culinary Historians of New York. She is the author of *Menus and Memories from Punjab: Meals to Nourish Body and Soul* (Hippocrene, 2009) and the associated website, [www.ranisrecipes.com](http://www.ranisrecipes.com). Rani is from a family of Catholic and Central European heritage. It was during her studies at UM that she met her husband, a Sikh from Punjab, India. She learned much of her Punjabi cooking by working side by side in the kitchen with her mother-in-law for 30 years. At the same time, she worked for more than 20 years as a teacher of Sikh religion and history and a public-school guidance counselor.*



Illustration from the book, *Menus and Memories from Punjab*

There are many ways to look at the history of food— from its geographical and agricultural origins or from its anthropological aspects; as signifier of conquest, as nutrition, as medicine, as religious and class identifier, and even as spectacle. Punjabi food satisfies a culinary historian’s scrutiny in any of these areas. I hope the following overview might spark further scholarly interest in this fascinating region.

Punjab is a vast, fertile plain of northern India and present-day Pakistan where the Punjabi language is spoken, a language in the Indo-European family. It is bound by the Himalayas and Hindu Kush mountains in the north and west, the deserts of Sind and Rajasthan in the southwest and south, and Delhi and the Jumna River in the east and southeast.

The word Punjab means “Land of Five Rivers”. An advanced civilization, the Harappan, was present in the Indus Valley well over 5000 years ago. Not much is known about the indigenous religion(s) of those times, but these were city-dwellers with sophisticated food culture. They had houses with elaborate drains and kitchens. More is known about their culinary preferences, but much more is known about the invaders who began to replace them. Aryans, Scythians, Macedonians, Turks, Afghans, Moghuls, and British all left their cultural, religious and culinary footprints.

## The World Fame of Samosas and Tandoors

Forays into another country change both the traveler and the native, and Punjab is a prime example. Not only have the Punjabi people gained religions, cooking methods, and dishes, they have also exported them. Who in Cape Town, Katmandu, Quebec, or Christ Church has not had a *Samosa*? Punjabi food has become the standard of “Indian” food throughout the world, most probably because it retains an amalgam of the best dishes and methods brought to Punjab by these invaders who had, collectively, traveled the world throughout the millennia.

The Land of Five Rivers has seen the shifting of many political boundaries. There were grand kingdoms— at times large enough to cover the entire area— and smaller “city-states”, ancient and modern. In 1947, when India and Pakistan became independent from Great Britain, they suffered “Partition”, one of the worst forced migrations and mass killings of people the world had known. Punjabis were divided: Muslims migrated west into Pakistan, and Hindus and Sikhs migrated to east Punjab, which remained with India.

Culinary culture was always enriched by these terrible upheavals. Specialties of one region of Punjab became known in others. For example, the astounding variety of pickled vegetables and fruits, now routinely found in home kitchens, owes a lot to those persons displaced after 1947 who manufactured the pickles because they needed a new livelihood.

It was at this same time that the tandoor oven emerged from little-known villages, where it had been used by extended families to bake bread. A Sikh migrant from western Punjab, displaced during the Partition, came with a tandoor to Old Delhi where he opened the Moti Mahal restaurant in 1948. Tandoori cooking began to be the centerpiece of the new restaurant culture so ably described in Grove (2002).

The tandoor in its simplest form is a large cylinder with a side opening at the bottom for adding fuel and removing ashes. It was used to bake bread very quickly: the dough was slapped onto the inner wall, where it baked at over 700° F. The oven was usually made of good clay and shredded rope; once complete, a paste of yogurt, mustard oil, raw sugar, and ground spinach was rubbed on the inside to harden it.

Many people assume the tandoor to be native to India. But it came originally from the Middle East thousands of years ago; the name derives from the Babylonian word *tinuru*, meaning “fire”. It was Punjabis, however, not Mesopotamians, who made the tandoor world-famous. *Tandoori Roti*, *Naan*, and *Tandoori Chicken* are iconic Punjabi dishes.

*continued on next page*

Note: Recipes for all capitalized dishes mentioned in this article may be found in my book (Sidhu 2009).

### Rotees Are in Their DNA

Punjab has been unbelievably rich in agricultural products for thousands of years. It is blessed with the water of the five rivers, and has two to three growing seasons. Barley, rice, wheat, and legumes have been cultivated since ancient times.

Rice is a great example of the “two-way street” between conquerors and the conquered. Rice was unknown to Alexander the Great until his conquest of Punjab. He referred to it as a “strange plant standing in water and sown in beds” (Jaffrey 2003, p. 9). An indigenous dish, still popular, is the porridge called *kitcheree* made from rice boiled with lentils, or other grains and legumes depending on the region and the availability of water. [Editor’s Note: For an article on Afghani *kitcheree* made with mung beans and rice, see *Repast*, Summer 2005.]

Basmati rice is today exported to the whole world, and dishes like *Biriyani* and *Pilaw* enjoy international fame. *Biriyani* was historically a specialty of the Moghul rulers, and now of the Muslim community at festival time. The rice is half-boiled, then baked with meat and/or vegetables, enriched with *Ghee* (clarified butter), saffron, spices, and a yogurt sauce. *Pilaws*, now enjoyed throughout the Middle East, are prepared by sautéing rice in *Ghee* or oil with spices and onions, then adding boiling water.

Yet for all its rice dishes, Punjabis tend to eat rice only on special occasions. Instead, Punjab is and has been the “bread basket” of India. In fact, evidence has been excavated of four varieties of wheat cultivated as long ago as 6000 BCE. Grinding stones were also unearthed, so we know that the wheat was processed into flour. Granaries and three-legged pottery “boards” for rolling out dough into flatbreads are dated to 4000 BCE. No wonder that no Punjabi feels that he has eaten unless he has his “rotee”, the generic name for bread. It’s in his DNA!

Today one finds a dozen or more types of indigenous breads made from whole or refined wheat, chickpea flour (*besan*), or millet (*bajra*). These range from the *Phulka* (also known as *Chapatti*) containing finely ground whole wheat and water and prepared on a *tawa* or griddle, to richer, whole-wheat breads like *Roghane Rotee*, enriched with cream and fragrant with rose water. (These last two ingredients were most likely introduced by the cooks of the Persian courts, who were brought to Punjab by Moghul rulers.) Some breads are eaten by everyone and are meals in themselves, like pan-fried *Parauntha*, which may be stuffed with vegetables or meat. Some are deep-fried, like whole-wheat *Poori* or white-flour *Bhatura*. Also made with white flour are the now-famous *Naan* and *Kulcha*, which is a stuffed *Naan*.

Before the Bhakra Dam was built in the early 1960s, Punjab was occasionally subject to devastating droughts. Chickpeas, and legumes of many other varieties, played an important role in keeping the ancestors alive, as they still do today. Small chickpeas need very little water to grow. Legumes like beans and lentils are not only extremely nutritious with protein and

minerals, but in addition their roots produce nitrogen-fixing bacteria that help to fertilize the soil. Beans and lentils may be stewed whole, with or without their seed coats. There are dozens of types of dishes prepared from these legumes, ranging from fritters (*Pakorās*) to gravies (*Kuddee*) to breads (*Missi Roti*) and even sweets (*Mysore Pak*). Varieties of green, brown, black, and yellow lentils are used in beloved dishes like *Daal Mukhane*, black lentils with butter and kidney beans, or *tardka daal*, yellow chickpea lentils with a tempering of aromatics.

Mustard greens are another of the major crops, and the fields are bright yellow with flowers in February. Although most Westerners labor under the illusion that the Indian national dish must be *Chicken Tikka Masala* because it is on the menu of every overseas Indian restaurant, the iconic meal of Punjab is actually *Sarson da Saag* and *Mukkee di Roti*, stewed mustard greens on a flatbread of cornmeal, enjoyed with a glass of buttermilk. Only fresh ginger and the aromatics of onions and garlic are used for flavoring this dish, and it was most likely prepared the same way in ancient times. The bread, however, was probably *Missi Rotee*, made from chickpea flour mixed with some whole-wheat flour. The evidence for that includes the discovery of a 2800-year-old field with north/south furrows of mustard and east/west furrows of horse gram (chickpeas).

Evidence of eggplant, squash, and bitter gourds (*Karelay*) dates back thousands of years, as does the technique of frying in oil. Those wonderful deep-fried snacks *Samosa* and *Pakora* are of Punjabi origin, and one can imagine an inhabitant of ancient Mohenjodaro enjoying a spinach/onion *pakora* with *chutney* from a street vendor, just as one would in modern Ludhiana. Today, certain legume dishes are often prepared with squashes, spinach, or eggplant, including *Chana Daal/Kudoo* and *Peelee Daal Te Paalak Ke Bangan*.

Vegetables indigenous to the New World— corn, tomatoes, potatoes, chilies, and kidney beans— arrived much later, but are consumed extensively in Punjab. Corn (*mukkee*) made its way from Goa when the Portuguese, who controlled that region of India, brought it from the Americas.

Today, more vegetable dishes are regularly eaten in Punjab than in any other part of India. A great number of them can be found on restaurant menus across the globe, including *Aloo/Gobi* (stir-fried potatoes and cauliflower), *Baingan Bhartha* (roasted eggplant purée), and *Paalak Paneer* (spinach with cheese). The subtleties of texture and spicing make for tremendous variations. *Halvas*, which are sweets made from grated vegetables like carrots and pumpkin, are festive additions to a meal.

### Milk Reigns Supreme in Punjab

Since cattle arrived with the first wave of Aryans, milk and its products have held a special place in Punjabi cuisine. The Aryans came from the Caucasus region in waves between 3000 and 2000 BCE. They brought a religious system that has evolved considerably over time. The Vedas, the Hindu holy scriptures, were most probably written down in Punjab.

The well-known strength and height of Punjabis is attributed to their consumption of *Ghee* and milk. Water buffaloes supply much of the milk, with double the fat content of cow’s milk. That is why eating *Mutter Paneer*, made with fresh peas and



fresh pressed cheese at a roadside *dhaba*, or *Khoa Paneer*, the same creamy cheese cubes in a light tomato sauce enriched with grated dried milk, is so memorable.

There is a saying, which rhymes in Punjabi, that shows the esteem for butter: “There are a hundred uncles but only one father. There are a hundred medicines, but only one *ghee*.” Clarified butter keeps very well even in the heat of Summer. Punjabi soldiers, students, and even taxi and truck drivers away from home, will keep a precious stash of *Ghee* to drizzle on their lentils. *Ludoos* balls, made with chickpea flour and *Ghee*, stand at the top of the list of revered foods that are found at every important ceremony.

Besides turning milk into butter, heating and/or adding sugar to milk is a second way of preserving it. Sugarcane has been grown in Punjab for millennia; honey was also used as a sweetener— so, no wonder Punjabis have a sweet tooth. An astounding array of sweet dishes and sweetmeats can be found, many using milk as their base. Milk and sugar may be boiled into puddings or mixed with grated vegetables and nuts as in *Gajjerella*. Milk can be reduced slowly over a fire with or without sugar to produce *Rabardee* or *Khoa*, used in the fried milk balls soaked in rosewater syrup called *Gulab Jaman*. The milk fudge called *Burfee*, in all its flavorful incarnations with fruits and/or nuts, also begins as reduced milk. It can be soured, drained, and made into a loose cheese called *chenna*. The latter is the basis for *rusgoollay*, which are little patties boiled in syrup and flavored with cardamom, as well as for another divine dessert, *Rusmalai*, in which some heavy cream is added to the same patties in syrup.

A third way to preserve milk is to culture it, adding friendly bacteria, a little *jaag* from an old batch. Thus, yogurt and buttermilk play an especially important role in the Punjabi diet. *Raitas* may be described as yogurt salads of grated or chopped vegetables or fruits. They are almost always combined with spices and salt. *Chaat Masala* is a spice mixture often sprinkled on *Raitas* as well as on the yogurt salads called *Chaat*. *Chaat Masala* lends a sweet/sour note found so often in Punjabi dishes; the mixture includes ground black salt, which is a rather sulphurous, funky-smelling mineral, and green mango powder. Both *Raitas* and *Chaat* are extremely popular at roadside stalls because they mix crunchy and creamy textures with sweet/sour/salty and funky flavors.

### Food and Social Doctrine

Historically, Ayurveda, the ancient Hindu science of health and diet, promulgated a balance of six tastes: salty, sweet, sour, bitter, pungent, and astringent. The Ayurvedic physician needed to be a proficient cook. It was essential that he be able to choose foods with complimentary properties suitable to the time of year and to redressing the imbalances exhibited by the patient (Collingham 2006, p. 7). The ancient texts *Caraka Sambita* and *Susruta Sambita Vedas* recommended that the six tastes be present at every meal.

This way of conceptualizing food has left remnants up to the present. Punjabis today, no matter their class, religion, or caste, and whether they are conscious of the source or not, like to have the six tastes present in every meal. For example, the above-mentioned pan-fried flat bread *Parautha* is almost always eaten

with some type of pickle (salty/astringent), a raw chili (bitter/pungent), and a small bowl of plain yogurt (sour/sweet). Note that “sweet” doesn’t necessarily mean sugary; for example, plain milk is considered sweet, and lentils are considered sweet and astringent.

Even though a meal might satisfy each of the six tastes, the type of food cooked and the method of cooking it were, until quite recently, constrained by the specific caste and religious background of the diners. Thus, a meal told much about the person eating it. Class/caste food taboos are extensive in Punjab and generally are based on the religious beliefs of the community.

Most Westerners are aware of the orthodox Muslim prohibition against eating pork, and that of Hindus against beef. But did you know that all kinds of animal life were once eaten throughout India? Beef broth was recommended by the ancient Hindu texts as particularly useful for cases of infirmity. Until about 800 CE, most people in India consumed beef, venison, boar, lamb, goat, and the wild fowl from which the chicken was domesticated. For thousands of years, meat had been seasoned and grilled. Meat might also be marinated in mustard and long pepper and then fried in *Ghee*. Still other dishes were prepared using the premier Punjabi culinary technique called *tardka*, still common today, in which a paste of chopped onions, garlic, and ginger is sautéed in *Ghee*, then used as the medium for stewing meat.

It was only beginning with the great emperor Ashoka, a Buddhist vegetarian who ruled in 268-231 BCE, that the vegetarian diet even became an option in the minds of the elite. From Buddhism and Jainism, which had appeared in India around 500 BCE, Hindu priests gradually absorbed the prohibition of killing animals and moved toward semi-deification of the cow. But it was not until the time of Babur, who founded the Moghul empire early in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, that vegetarianism became firmly entrenched in the Brahmanic (priestly) caste. Collingham (2006, p. 20) believes that this social transformation occurred because food became the core metaphor for a paradigm shift: away from violence, which represented political power, and toward purity, which represented religious power. The easily digested vegetarian diet was a symbol of such purity.

The renunciation of violence extended to a suspicion of all forms of passion, to the extent that onions and garlic, which were considered to stimulate the passions, were eliminated from the diet. This prohibition against onions and garlic is still generally practiced by the Kashmiri Brahmins and by Hindus in south India. But it never caught on in Punjab, even though there are strong vegetarian traditions there. One reason for this was Sikh influence.

Sikhism was born in the Punjabi village of Kartarpur during this time of cultural ferment in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Its founder, Guru Nanak, was non-judgmental in matters of doctrine. He taught that remembering God, living an honest, hard-working life, and sharing with the unfortunate are more important than diet or rituals. In every *gurudwara* (Sikh temple) throughout the world, anyone may receive a free, simple, vegetarian, Punjabi-style meal, no matter their religion or caste. On the floor, in

*continued on next page*

**PUNJAB***continued from page 7*

rows, a beggar may sit next to a prince and eat in typical Punjabi fashion off rimmed trays of steel or brass (*thali*), with small bowls (*cowlees*) of clay or steel or silvered brass holding stewed lentils or yogurt. Traditionally, no utensils were used; pieces of *Chapatti* or other flatbread would be broken off, always with the right hand, and used as a scoop for the *daal* or other legumes. In no other place in India was caste or class ignored in this way.

In hovels and palaces, however, caste and class may still influence the meal, and what people eat becomes a clue to their ancestry. For instance, game is relished by certain farmers in Punjab, but never partaken of by other farmers. It is likely that those in the first category are descended from the waves of invaders from neighboring Rajasthan over 1000 years ago, who were absorbed into Punjabi society as a caste of soldiers and rulers. This princely caste, the Rajputs, engaged in hunting as a crucial way to keep fit and well-trained for battle. The Rajputs intermarried with local farming people, but retained their traditional customs and preferences.

#### Princely Wealth and the Spice Trade

Lavishness and richness of meals, found mainly among city dwellers, is a clue of past association with royal courts. Examples of such opulence include covering meats or sweets with silver or gold leaf on special occasions, and the extensive use of spices.

Even the popular Punjabi finishing spice mixture, *Garam Masala*, beloved throughout the world, is used mainly by city dwellers. By contrast, in most ordinary homes, onions, garlic, ginger, cumin, and coriander seeds are the everyday flavorings.

Certain herbs and spices had been produced in Punjab since ancient times. We know that by 3000 BCE, mustard seeds, cumin, asafetida, coriander, long pepper, onions, and garlic were being used by the Harappans and Aryans. Ginger and turmeric were cultivated and used in fresh or dried form. The pickling spices in *Achaar Masala*, viz., whole black mustard, onion seed, and fennel, were also indigenous.

By contrast, other spices remained expensive luxuries because they had to be procured through trade or conquest, a process that has played an important role in spreading culture. Sumer had trade links with the Indus Valley via the Hindu Kush mountains by 3000 BCE. The well-known sea routes from the Spice Islands and southern India northward to the Arabian Sea and the Middle East became very active in Medieval times. The sweet spices (cinnamon, cloves, cardamom) and black pepper were traded overland across Asia through the Khyber Pass. Such spices were almost as expensive in Punjab as they were in Europe, and were used sparingly by all but the most extravagant.

It was in the kitchens of the princes of the Phulkian dynasties in the last two centuries that Punjabi food reached the heights for which it is known today. The palaces employed an amazing variety and subtlety of cooking styles, both indigenous and copied from the invaders, including tandoori, frying, stir-frying, and stewing.

The choice of spices is one way to tell an ancient recipe from a more opulent one originating with the Moghuls. For

example, grilled dry dishes with an abundance of spices, such as *Murgh Masaladar*, were rarely prepared in ordinary homes. Similarly, *korma*-style meat dishes using lots of yogurt and expensive spices and nuts originated in the Moghlai courts; turmeric, an indigenous spice, is almost never used in them. *Dum Pukht* is a technique in which meat or vegetables are covered in spices with or without sauce, then the lid of the pot is sealed with a ring of fresh dough to keep in the steam. The justly famous *Aloo Dum* are potatoes cooked in this fashion.

British royalty and other high colonial officials in the region partook of these sumptuous dishes when they were entertained by *rajahs*. Dining off golden plates, they might sample the mild dishes of meat, fish, or vegetables in *Saas*, which is thickened with ground almonds and luscious with cream and sweet spices. They might then be offered fabulous *Navrattan Pilaw*, rice with nine “jewels”, or *Mitha Pilaw*, rice with sweet spices, raisins, coconut, and orange zest. The *pièce de résistance* might be a whole roasted goat stuffed with whole chickens stuffed with fabulous *pilaw*.

Moghul-style sauces were thickened in a way quite different from the British custom, which used wheat flour. Instead, herbs and spices, seeds and nuts would be ground up and then sautéed together slowly: onion, garlic, ginger, coriander seed, white poppy seed (never black), and almonds. Sometimes, chickpea flour (*besan*) would also be used, and in more recent times, concentrated tomato.

#### The Legacy of British Rule

The British colonials liked dishes that were thoroughly cooked (think mushy peas, etc.), and they designated any Indian-style dish as “curry”, maybe because the word for a savory dish with sauce or liquid is *thurry* in Punjabi. Yet the Groves (2002) argue that the word “curry” was used in England well before the British presence in India; they believe the word derives from the Old French *cuire*, meaning to cook, boil, or grill.

The British also favored “cutlets”, which are leftover cooked and seasoned vegetables or meats formed into patties held together with egg, potato, or breadcrumbs. These mainly vegetarian *cutless* or *Tikis* are still enjoyed in northern India at tea time.

The British promoted tea drinking among urban Punjabis. The colonials had a monopoly of the tea plantations in other parts of India, and the leaves could be shipped easily to city merchants. Milk, however, has remained the supreme beverage in Punjab as a whole. Tea was not enjoyed throughout the region until relatively recently, but in cities the culture of tea drinking is strong. Eating little bites of *Samosas*, *Kebabs*, and *Tikis* along with tea (always with milk and sugar) is a British legacy.

Another Britishism is that Punjabis call goat meat “mutton”. Goat meat was adored by the Moghul rulers, and hundreds of recipes for it have been passed down. From the *Seekh Kebab* of ground meat to the whole roasted leg, *Raan*, goat is by far the most popular meat. Bone-in cuts are preferred. In the west of Punjab, lamb replaces goat, not only because of its availability, but also because it is preferred for its milder taste.

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# DESSERT AND THE MUGHALS

by Michael Kronld

*Michael Kronld is a food and travel writer, culinary historian, cooking instructor, and installation artist in New York, and a member of the Culinary Historians of New York. His most recent book is Sweet Invention: A History of Dessert (Chicago Review Press, 2011), which has an associated website, [www.sweetinvention.net](http://www.sweetinvention.net). His earlier books include The Taste of Conquest: The Rise and Fall of the Three Great Cities of Spice (Ballantine Books, 2007) and Around the American Table (Adams Media, 1995), a tour of the cookbook collection at the New York Public Library.*

Some years back, when I first visited the subcontinent, I had no idea how obsessed Indians were with dessert. But as I began to research the subject for my book, *Sweet Invention*, it dawned on me that in no other society is dessert so central to the culture. Sweets are essential in Hindu worship, life's passages, and many other rituals. Moreover, the variety can be mind-boggling. I must confess, though, that in terms of the history I was only able to scratch the surface, limited as I was to European-language sources. Though some older sources have been translated (the 12<sup>th</sup>-Century *Mānasōllāsa* among the most intriguing), there remains a great deal of work to do. The following is an excerpt from the chapter on the influence of the

Muslim Central Asian dynasties that ruled northern India for much of the Second Millennium and looked to Persia for many of their cultural cues, whether in language, religion, architecture, painting or, for that matter, dining habits. (The influence of Persian cooking on culinary habits from Paris to Calcutta would make another interesting and worthwhile study.)

In Delhi, under the Mughals, Persian became the official language of court despite the fact that it wasn't even the invaders' mother tongue. But India, as every visitor will attest, is hard to resist. Mughal culture, whether in dress, decor, manners, or morals, began to acquire something of a national patina, leading to a subtle marriage of Persian design with Indian style.

The one cultural sphere where mutual influence occurred only at arm's remove was in the matter of food. Hindu dietary rules, which grew even more restrictive during the years of Muslim rule (perhaps precisely to keep the new elite at a distance?), would not allow an upper-caste Brahmin to break bread with a Muslim. As a result, two parallel cuisines developed in the parts of India with a substantial Muslim population: a meat-based "Mughal" cuisine, and a mostly vegetarian Hindu style of cooking. The sweets were different, too. Hindus had their milk-based sweets while Muslims typically preferred the *halwas* and other desserts that originated in the Middle East.

Robert Montgomery Martin, a British census official, reporting on conditions in northern Bengal notes how separate the two groups of sweet-makers were even as late as the 1830s. "The people, who prepare sweetmeats from curds," he writes, "are called Moyra among the Bengalese, and Haluyikors [a word derived from *halwa*] in western India. The artists of the two

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**A collection of Indian sweets.**

**Photos by Michael Kronld.**

**DESSERT & THE MUGHALS** *continued from p. 9*

countries, however, keep totally distinct; and those of Bengal use most milk, while those originally from western India use more flour in their sweetmeats.” It’s amusing to note how his Victorian taste buds were aghast at the local delicacies. “These sweetmeats”, he notes with palpable distaste, “please neither the eye nor palate of Europeans... [though] the rich natives use large quantities.”<sup>1</sup>

We know a great deal more about the food of the Mughal era than about earlier periods, in part due to the swarm of Western visitors who descended upon India to make their fortune after 1498. Most were not as closed-minded as Mr. Martin, even if they were equally amazed by the amount of sweet snacks consumed by Indians.

One awestruck European was Edward Terry, a young chaplain assigned to the English ambassador at the Mughal court between 1616 and 1619. Edward was barely out of divinity school at Oxford when he reached India, and hadn’t expected such a prominent post.<sup>2</sup> But the ambassador’s chaplain had recently died, so the English country boy was thrust into hobnobbing with India’s nabobs. Keep in mind that at this time the Mughal sovereign ruled an empire of a hundred million while all of Great Britain could claim fewer than five million souls. What’s more, the emperor claimed between one third and one half of all crops in taxes. Moreover, money flowed even more freely than these statistics suggest. Much of the imperial revenue was ceded to courtiers and officials— however, only for their lifetime. This gave Mughal grandees every incentive to spend as much as possible, since whatever was left over would all revert to the emperor upon their death. As a result, Mughal grandees burned through their cash in a great conflagration of conspicuous consumption. Courtiers of relatively modest rank packed their stables with Arabian horses, populated their harems with Indian and African dancing girls, and filled their servants’ quarters with slaves. To the English this level of spending beggared belief. When it came to food, weekday suppers in Delhi grew to resemble imperial banquets. Terry had the chance to witness one of these quotidian meals when he and the ambassador were invited to supper by Asaf Khan, the monarch’s brother-in-law.<sup>3</sup> Today, Asaf Khan is best known as the father to Mumtaz Mahal, whose tomb, the Taj Mahal, would become one of Mughal India’s greatest ornaments, but in his day he was in the emperor’s inner circle and one of the most powerful men in India.

The dinner Terry describes is served in a large ornate tent, the air filled with perfume, the floor piled with expensive carpets on which the host, the ambassador, and the chaplain recline. There are no other guests. Servants arrive bearing silver dishes trimmed with gold. They are not enormous (“not larger than our largest trencher plates”, Terry notes) but they descend upon the diners in a seemingly endless cascade. The chaplain counts 50 for himself, 60 for the host, and 70 for the ambassador. Even if our impressionable informant exaggerates a little, there must have been a huge amount of food for just the three of them. Terry made a conscientious effort to taste just about everything within reach, and reports that he was most pleased with the result.

What is noteworthy about Asaf Khan’s little soirée is that it is fundamentally Persian, not Indian. There are numerous pilafs or rice dishes made both with meat and without, some tinted yellow with saffron, others purple (“by what ingredient I know not; but

this I am sure, that it all tasted very well”). There are stews of various kinds of meat and poultry. But the Englishman seemed especially impressed by the sweetmeats:

To [accompany these meat dishes] we had many jellies and culices [aspics]; rice ground to flour, then boiled, and after sweeten’d with sugar-candy and rose-water, to be eaten cold. The flour of rice, mingled with sweet almonds, made as small as they could, and with some of the most fleshy parts of hens, stewed with it, and after, the flesh so beaten into pieces, that it could not be discerned, all made sweet with rose-water and sugar-candy, and scented with Ambergrease; this was another of our dishes, and a most luscious one, which the Portuguese call *mangee real* [*manjar real*], food for a King. Many other dishes we had, made up in cakes, of several forms, of the finest of the wheat flour, mingled with almonds and sugar-candy, whereof some were scented, and some not. To these potatoes [sweet potatoes?] excellently well dressed; and to them divers sallads of the curious fruits of that country, some preserved in sugar, and others raw; and to these many roots candied, almonds blanched, raisons of the sun, prunellas, and I know not what, of all enough to make up the [fifty and more] number of dishes before named...<sup>4</sup>

The almonds, the rosewater, the ambergris, the candied fruit, these are all Middle Eastern imports. Some of the combinations Terry describes would certainly have been too alien for the Hindu palate, others were too pricy. The *blancmange*— the sweet pudding of rice, almond, and chicken, scented with ambergris— was both. This *mangee real*, as he calls it, was a common enough dish in Europe and the Muslim world at the time, but to observant Hindus the presence of chicken would have made it taboo. And the ambergris was fantastically expensive. Yet even while many dishes never made it out of the Sultan’s kitchen, others were adapted and absorbed into the dessert repertoire of the country’s majority.

The cakes Terry describes must have been halva, and Indians of all creeds took to them with glee. The origin of Indian halva is unmistakably Middle Eastern; the name itself is originally Arabic (*halwā* meaning sweetmeat). In the Middle East there are two types of halva, an older type, made with flour, and a more recent variant that substitutes a nut, or more commonly sesame-seed paste. It is the former version that Terry would have tasted. In today’s India this is called *sooji* (semolina) halva. It has the consistency of a dense brownie or a slightly crumbly cake. You make it by frying semolina in ghee, then adding syrup. This is cooked briefly until the water is absorbed. A Mughal-era recipe tells you to use equal parts flour, ghee, and refined sugar. Today halva is often enriched with dried fruit, nuts, and spices. Generally it is cut in diamonds and is often decorated with a little silver foil.

There are dozens of variants of halva. *Moong dal halva* substitutes crushed mung beans for the semolina, and stirs in milk and sugar instead of plain syrup. The fudge-like *gajar* (carrot) halva is made by cooking down carrots with milk and sugar, then stirring in ghee and dry milk.<sup>5</sup> There are bottle-gourd halvas, fig halvas, pumpkin halvas, and rice halvas, just to name a few. Not surprisingly, most are associated with north India, but the



southern state of Kerala has its own “banana” halvras made with ripe plantains, ghee, and sugar.<sup>6</sup> The dessert became so popular that in many parts of India *halwai* is the generic name for a sweet-maker.

Another fashion imported from the Middle East was a taste for sorbets, which is what the Mughals called a flavored syrup (rather than a frozen dessert). The ever informative Moroccan travel writer Ibn Battuta mentions an event in Delhi where great basins were filled with a kind of sugar-sweetened soft drink flavored with rose water. In yet another passage he notes: “They offer cups of gold, silver, and glass, filled with sugar-water. They call it sherbert (sic) and drink it before eating.”<sup>7</sup> This was still in the mid-1300s in the days of the Delhi sultanate.

By the Mughal period these soft drinks were often chilled, and a great deal of money and effort were devoted to procuring ice and snow to this end. Abul-Fazl devoted several pages to the matter in the *Ain-i-Akbari*, his meticulous dissertation on the administration of emperor Akbar’s empire. Ice and snow were transported some 500 miles from the Himalayas by carriage, boat, and on foot. Even more intriguingly, the Mughals had figured out how to chill water by the use of saltpeter.<sup>8</sup> If you stir enough of the chemical into water it will actually cause it to freeze.

It is this technology, initially developed to chill drinks, that likely led to *kulfi*, the Indian answer to ice cream, certainly one of the more delightful outcomes of the encounter of Mughal and indigenous sweet makers. According to the Indian food historian K. T. Achaya, these desserts were first made in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

A mixture of the dense evaporated milk so common in Hindu sweetmeats was flavored with pistachios and saffron, then packed in metal cones before being immersed in an ice slurry, a procedure that is still followed today.<sup>9</sup> The word *kulfi* comes from the Persian term *qulfi* meaning a covered cup.

Even if there may have been many sweets at Terry’s meal, they were certainly not served as a final dessert course. This

seems to have been the case among the Muslim elite earlier as well. Ibn Battuta describes a meal in Delhi that began with glasses of sweet sherbet scented with rosewater. After this came a roast accompanied by bread served with different sorts of halva placed in the middle of it. Presumably you ate this as a kind of wrap, or sweetmeat sandwich, to accompany the meat. (Persians still eat halva in this way.<sup>10</sup>) The next course consisted of more meat dishes, meat-stuffed samosas and a pilaf with a whole roast chicken on top. Then came another sweet and a kind of pudding. Though the meal Ibn Battuta outlines is more modest than Terry’s feast (a mere 40 dishes instead of some 60), the pattern is similar. Platters of meat, rice, and bread were interspersed with what we would call dessert.<sup>11</sup>

Yet despite their well-developed sweet tooth, the Muslim elite could never quite catch up to their Hindu neighbors. During his sojourn, Terry noted with some amazement that the more observant

Hindus lived on no more than “herbs and roots, and bread, milk, butter, cheese, and sweetmeats.” Not that we should conclude from this that the vegetarian Brahmin were necessarily abstemious. The long-lived poet Surdas (1478-1583) devoted several verses to the breakfasting habits of the North Indian upper classes. He tells us that the day’s first meal consisted of bread,

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Bhim Chandra Nag is a confectioner in Kolkata that dates back almost 200 years.

**DESSERT & THE MUGHALS** *continued from p. 11*  
ghee, milk, and yogurt, but also some 10 confections and a half-dozen kinds of fruit and nuts. The dinners he describes were equally blessed with sweets.<sup>12</sup>

Other European visitors who arrived in India at the height of Mughal rule were as impressed as Terry by the mountains of sweetmeats everywhere. The Spanish Friar Sebastian Manrique, who traveled from Bengal to Punjab in the 1630s, reported on how the Bengalis had “many kinds of lecteus [lacteous, i.e., milk-based] food and of sweetmeats prepared in their own way, for they have a great abundance of sugar in those parts.” He was impressed to find “huge amounts of foodstuffs and dainties of all sorts” in the “numerous Bazars or markets.” He writes, “Entire streets could be seen wholly occupied by skilled sweetmeat-makers who proved their skill by offering wonderful sweet scented dainties of all kinds which would stimulate the most jaded appetite to gluttony.”<sup>13</sup> In later years the British would reward their native troops with sweets instead of the liquor rations provided for their own soldiers.<sup>14</sup> ■

### Endnotes

1. Robert Montgomery Martin, *The History, Antiquities, Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India* (London: W. H. Allen and Co, 1838), p. 943.
2. Sidney Lee, ed., *The Dictionary of National Biography*, Volume 56 (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1898), p. 86.
3. Edward Terry, *A Voyage to East-India* (London: J. Wilkie, 1777), see especially section X, pp. 193-199.
4. Terry, p. 197.
5. Pramila Parmar, *Mithai: A Collection of Traditional Indian Sweets* (New Delhi: UBSPD, 1994), pp. 41-43.
6. Somewhat confusingly, Indians typically refer to the eating variety of bananas as “plantains”, and to the larger cooking variety (known as plantains in the U. S.) as “bananas”.
7. Noël Deerr, *The History of Sugar* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1949), p. 51.
8. ‘Allami Abul-Fazl, Henry Blochmann, and H. S. Jarrett, *The Ain i Akbari* (Kolkata: Baptist Mission Press, 1873), p. 55.
9. K. T. Achaya, *A Historical Dictionary of Indian Food* (Delhi and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), p. 132. There is admittedly a problem with Achaya’s assertion, which he traces to a description in the *Ain-i-Akbari*. Having looked at the same translation as he has, I can’t find any mention of it.
10. Najmieh Batmanglij, *New Food of Life* (Bloomington, IN: 1stBooks, 2003), p. 334.
11. These descriptions are quoted in Minakshie Dasgupta, Bunny Gupta, and Jaya Chaliha, *The Calcutta Cookbook*, (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1995), where they are credited to K. T. Achaya, “Early Travellers Tales”, in *Science Age*, May 1985.
12. See Satya Prakash Sangar, *Food and Drinks in Mughal India* (New Delhi: Reliance, 1999), pp. 16-17. Sûr Dâs [also Surdas] mentions the following sweets and fruits taken at breakfast in the houses of the affluent people: milk, butter and curd; *amrit pakori*, *jalebi khurma*, *ghuja*, *shakarpârâ*, *laddu*, *mâlpûra*; *andarsa*; *khajuri*; *kharik*; *chironji*, raisins; almonds; pistachio, copra; banana; mango; apricots; cashew nuts; water melon; dry date; besides *pheni* etc. Those who could afford it, enjoyed a

rich dinner including the following vegetables, sweets and fruits: *Besanpûri*, *sukhpûri* and *luchai* [breads]; ghee and *khîr*; *gindori*; *tingari*; *gondpak* and *ilaichipak*; *andarsa*, *pheni* [sweet] and *lapsi*; *gujha* and *kharik*, *jalebi* and *amriti*; raisins and copra, almonds and *chirâri*...

13. Sangar, p. 42.

14. Philippart, John, Sir, *The East India Military Calendar*, Vol. 2 (London: Kingsbury, Parbury, and Allen, 1824), see footnote, p. 150.

### PUNJAB

*continued from page 8*

Our survey here has shown that many cultures and forces converged over the millennia to produce the cuisine of Punjab. Social, religious, and cultural revolutions can be traced in the flavors of every dish. It is surely a worthy subject for the culinary historian. ■

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*Coming in our Winter 2013 Issue—*

## Food Customs of India, Part 2

- “Traditional Cooking in Maharashtra State”  
by Dr. Hemalata Dandekar, Professor & Dept. Head, City and Regional Planning Department, California Polytechnic State University
- “The Early History of Rice in India”  
by Dr. Tuktuk Ghosh Kumar, Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India.



REPORT ON THE C.H.A.A. THEME MEAL



# A NEW ENGLAND DINNER

We all felt like Founding Fathers (and Mothers) at our semi-annual participatory meal last December 11. An original drawing of “Ye Sacred Cod” took an honored spot on the fireplace mantle in the great hall, mimicking the carved version that has graced the chamber of the Massachusetts House of Representatives since 1784. Each of our six round dining tables, earmarked for a particular New England state, had been covered with a red plastic tablecloth on which CHAA members Art and Joanne Cole had written, with black marker, the names of some of the classic foods of that state.

We’re grateful to the Coles for selecting the theme, organizing the feast, and decorating the venue at the Earhart Village clubhouse. Because of their New England roots, this affair was like a homecoming for them: Joanne is originally from Braintree, Mass., while Art lived in Hartford, Conn. until age 5, when his family moved to Ohio. In addition, our founding members Jan and Dan Longone are both from Massachusetts.

Herewith, a report on all of the dishes prepared for the occasion, within which we have interwoven, as in a sampler of embroidery, longer threads of New England culinary history.

### Fruits of a New World

Two beverages at our meal reminded us that after the first European settlers arrived in New England, they tried to duplicate something like the spirits of the old country:

- Madeira wine [contributed by Rita Goss]
- Hot spiced cranberry-apple punch [contributed by Joanne and Art Cole], from an edition of the *Fannie Farmer Cookbook*.

Many fruits transplanted from Europe— such as apples and pears, cherries and currants— thrived in the New World, but that was not the case for grapes. While some varieties, including Madeira, Malaga, and Lisbon, were occasionally grown in gardens for home use in southern New England and New York, all efforts in North America to cultivate them on a commercial scale failed until after 1800, mostly because of New World pests such as *phylloxera*.

That left imported wine to help fill the gap. Wine imports from France were hampered by trade restrictions, unlike Madeira, which was made by the Portuguese on their island possession of that name. Fortified and improved by the heat of stowage during the Atlantic crossing, Madeira was the wine whose qualities were sturdiest in withstanding the voyage. It was consumed by all classes in the 13 colonies, where its trade loomed large in the political and social fabric.

Imported rum was also widely available in early New England (more below), as were locally produced beer, ale, and cider.

In their efforts to reproduce European-style punches and other drinks, settlers also made use of a bounty of indigenous fruits such as the American cranberry, blueberry, and elderberry, and Concord and other grapes. Fannie Farmer’s punch recipe, used by the Coles, calls for equal parts cranberry juice and apple cider. The first edition of Farmer’s cookbook was published in Boston by Little, Brown, in 1896. She was then near the middle of her 10-year stint as principal of the Boston Cooking School, the most important center in promoting the “scientific cooking” movement. The latter, which argued for the importance of diet and nutrition in overall health as well as the need to artfully

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Two young women in Massachusetts in 1913 in a romanticized depiction of colonial cooking chores in front of a large fireplace. Note the cast-iron cooking pot hanging above the fire, and the pewter plates on a shelf above the mantle.

Photo by Wallace Nutting

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**NEW ENGLAND***continued from page 13*

prepare and present dishes, is explored in CHNY member Laura Shapiro's *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (New York, 1986).

The earliest mention of "cranberry sauce" in an American cookbook is found exactly one century before Farmer's book, in Amelia Simmons's *American Cookery*, a work first published in Hartford, Conn. in 1796 and subsequently in many editions in New York, Vermont, Connecticut, and Massachusetts.

There were several other dishes at our meal that made use of cranberries, including two contributed by Pat Cornett and Mel Annis. Only a couple of months earlier, they had made their first visit to Mystic Seaport in Connecticut. Using recipes in the *Christmas Memories Cookbook* (Mystic, 1985) by Lynn Anderson, Lois Klee, and Connie Colom, they brought us:

- Cranberry Chutney
- Sweet Potato – Apple Casserole, with cranberries added.

### Cereals and Baked Goods

New England is famous for traditional old puddings and hardy baked goods:

- Indian pudding [Jan Arps and Tavi Prundeanu], from the Concord [Mass.] Antiquarian Society Museum's *An Olde Concord Christmas* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980)
- Anadama bread [Rita Goss], from Melissa Clark's recipe in the *New York Times* (Nov. 12, 2008)
- Boston brown bread with raisins [Judy Steeh and Bob DiGiovanni], from *The Gourmet Cookbook: More Than 1000 Recipes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), compiled by the longtime editor of that former cooking magazine, Ann Arbor native and Univ. of Michigan alumna Ruth Reichl
- Rolled-oats bread [Phil and Barbara Zaret], from the unpublished typescript of Mary and Alice Puffer's cookbook of recipes from Nobleboro, Maine (1943), held by the Univ. of Michigan's Clements Library. Served with honey-mustard butter.

A French traveler in the 1700's was probably reacting to the array of local corn-based products when he wrote, upon his return, that New England was an outpost where settlers were content to eat "half baked bread", and puddings that were nothing but "boiled pastes".

By the time the first Europeans had arrived, many of the Indian tribes of what is now the northeastern U.S. were settled, or only semi-nomadic, based on their yearly harvests of what they called the "Three Sisters": corn, beans, and squashes and pumpkins. Some tribes, such as the Wampanoag of Rhode Island and southern Massachusetts, gave seed corn to the earliest settlers and taught them how to plant it in raised mounds that included crushed seashells for fertilizer, and interspersed with beans and squash for soil replenishment. The cornstalks could also serve as bean poles. Corn kernels, once cut from the harvested ears, could be eaten whole or hulled, usually in the form of *hominy* in dishes such as *succotash* (the latter word derived from the language of the Narragansett people of Rhode Island), or else ground into a meal used to make porridges and

simple unleavened breads such as hoe cakes (also called journey or Johnny cakes) and slapjacks.

Indian pudding is a sweetened porridge, baked in an oven or range at low heat for hours. In Winter, it was often baked overnight and served for breakfast. It is usually made with cornmeal, scalded milk and/or butter, raisins, molasses and/or sugar, and cinnamon and nutmeg. Jan Arps also added ginger (as had Fannie Farmer in her book), and she served us her very tasty version dessert-style, accompanied by whipped cream. The pudding can also be topped with cold milk or cream, or a hard sauce. Hasty Pudding is a half-hour version of the dish, made with either corn or rye meal. Another version was still being called "Pequot Pudding" in a 1922 edition of *Good Housekeeping's Book of Menus, Recipes, and Household Discoveries*; the Pequot tribe had inhabited the coast, in an area that straddles the border of what are now Connecticut and Rhode Island.

Although these practices stretch back to the 1600's, the first cornmeal recipes printed in a cookbook are in Amelia Simmons's 1796 work, mentioned earlier. By her instructions, the pudding can either be baked in a pot or boiled in a tied bag of strong cloth, which is suspended in a kettle of water in the fireplace. The cloth-bag method allowed the housewife to tend to other tasks during the cooking, and to economize on expensive pots. In addition, Simmons instructed how to dry the used corncobs and burn them in the smoking of ham and bacon. (Curing with molasses or maple sugar and smoking with corncobs made New England hams quite different from Southern ones: fresher, sweeter, less salty, albeit with a shorter shelf life.) She also gave recipes for similar sweet puddings made with white potato, crookneck squash, or pumpkin. For more on Indian pudding, including many historical recipes from 1796 to 1896, see Jan Longone's article, "As American as Indian Pudding", *Repast*, Summer 2006, pp. 12-15.

The three breads at our meal were leavened either with yeast, in the case of Anadama bread, or with baking soda, in the case of brown bread and rolled-oats bread (see "Getting a Good Rise" on next page). Anadama can almost be characterized as a bread-loaf version of Indian pudding, since it is made simply by adding some wheat flour and yeast to the same cornmeal batter, leaving out the raisins, and baking in a bread pan. The origin of the name, which first appeared in print in 1915, is a mystery, but this type of bread is believed to have originated in Rockport and Gloucester, Mass., neighboring fishing villages north of Boston. Its existence in Rockport is recorded by 1850, and by the turn of the century the breads, made by one Baker Knowlton, were being delivered in a horse-drawn cart to households there.

Boston brown bread is steamed, giving it a texture close to that of a moist cake or British-style pudding. The batter is poured into a vessel that is covered, then set in a pot or deep pan of water that is kept boiling for 1-2 hours. The ingredients are similar to Anadama but with a higher proportion of molasses, resulting in an even darker bread. Some or all of the white flour can be replaced with ingredients such as graham, rye, and/or buckwheat flour.

Within New England, the name "steamed graham bread" was often used instead of "Boston brown bread". Graham is a coarse whole-wheat flour that gets its brown color from the bran, which is removed from refined flours. It is named for Sylvester

Graham, a Presbyterian minister in Massachusetts who in 1829 invented a bread made from such flour. At the same time he launched a controversial but influential campaign against refined flours as well as meat, fats, spices, condiments, and alcohol, all of which he considered bad for health and moral character.

In former times, brown bread was often boiled in a pudding-bag, then briefly browned in an oven. If the steaming method was used, then the batter was instead poured into an earthenware or cast-iron pan. But after 1878, when Boston-based Chase and Sanborn became the first company to pack roasted coffee in

*continued on next page*

## Getting a Good Rise

Early Yankee housewives wanted to make refined European-style breads, cakes, and puddings— but in conditions that were decidedly less than refined, especially outside the cities. This contradiction helped give rise to the now-international practice of leavening with baking powder.

Traditionally, most baked goods had been leavened in one of three ways:

- very vigorous kneading or beating, which breaks down the dough into microscopic layers of fiber
- the “sponge method”, where an egg-sugar mixture whipped with air is added to the dough or batter
- the “starter method”, where a fermenting yeast agent, often a residue of beer or ale from the home kitchen or a local brewery, is added so that bubbles of carbon dioxide will form.

The first two methods, based on physical processes, needed very intensive labor and sometimes a lot of expensive eggs. The last method, based on a biological process, was slow-acting and imparted a “yeasty” taste to the goods. And especially in warm weather, yeast could sour easily.

Dutch and German bakers who settled in New York knew a fourth traditional European method of leavening: adding an alkaline powder to the dough. This technique, which creates carbon dioxide bubbles by a purely chemical process, is quicker and easier than the others. Early forms of such a baking powder included potassium carbonate (known as “pearl ash”) and sodium carbonate (known as “soda ash” or “sal soda”). Pearl ash, a refined form of the potash that is produced in the burning of wood, became an export from New Netherland, and its use began to spread through the northern colonies. Most rural housewives in the region produced pearl ash as a routine kitchen chore, in a process described by William Woys Weaver in his *America Eats: Forms of Edible Folk Art* (1989), pp. 133-134.

Amelia Simmons’s 1796 work *American Cookery*, published in Hartford, Conn., was the world’s first cookbook to recommend pearl ash for leavening (Harry Haff, *The Founders of American Cuisine: Seven Cookbook Authors, with Historical Recipes* [Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2011], pp. 27-28). By the 1820s, pearl ash was a common kitchen item in much of the northeastern U.S. Unfortunately, its use imparted a bad flavor to many baked goods.

In the 1840s, pearl ash was superseded by two other baking powders that work on the same principle and were both known as “saleratus”: potassium bicarbonate and sodium bicarbonate, the latter called “baking soda” these days. These powders were activated by sour milk or molasses, and were often sold in paper envelopes with baking recipes enclosed or printed on the side. John E. Dwight of South Hadley, Mass., was the first to commercially produce baking soda, beginning in 1846. It made

him a fortune, and he became a major benefactor for Mount Holyoke College, located in that town. In 1896, his John Dwight & Co. would merge with a rival, Church & Co., owner of the Arm

and Hammer brand.

That brand, today the world’s leading sodium bicarbonate, is still manufactured by the Church & Dwight Co.



Label c. 1900

In the 1850’s, Harvard professor Eben Horsford added ingredients that made the baking-soda reaction easier to control, resulting in the first really reliable baking powder. He would eventually market it under the label Rumford Baking Powder, today owned by Clabber Girl.

Thanks to these products, it became possible for every housewife to place refined, home-baked goods proudly on her table. Even so, every generation has seemed to rediscover the “wholesome virtues” of more primitive fare. In his two years living in a cabin at Walden Pond outside Boston, Thoreau experimented with a variety of breads, including hoe-cakes baked on a wooden plank over an outdoor fire, and loaves made of rye flour and corn meal:

Leaven, which some deem the soul of bread, the *spiritus* which fills its cellular tissue, which is religiously preserved like the vestal fire— some precious bottleful, I suppose, first brought over in the Mayflower, did the business for America, and its influence is still rising, swelling, spreading, in cerealian billows over the land— this seed I regularly and faithfully procured from the village, till at length one morning I forgot the rules, and scalded my yeast; by which accident I discovered that even this was not indispensable— for my discoveries were not by the synthetic but analytic process— and I have gladly omitted it since, though most housewives earnestly assured me that safe and wholesome bread without yeast might not be, and elderly people prophesied a speedy decay of the vital forces. Yet I find it not to be an essential ingredient, and after going without it for a year am still in the land of the living; and I am glad to escape the trivialness of carrying a bottleful in my pocket, which would sometimes pop and discharge its contents to my discomfiture. It is simpler and more respectable to omit it. Man is an animal who more than any other can adapt himself to all climates and circumstances. Neither did I put any sal-soda, or other acid or alkali, into my bread. (Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, or, Life in the Woods* [1854], “Economy”, Part 4)

– RKS

## NEW ENGLAND *continued from page 15*

sealed cans, it became common to use an empty coffee can for this purpose, giving the loaf a distinctive cylindrical shape; eventually, the bread could actually be purchased in tin cans. Thanks to Boston native Jan Longone for lending Judy one or two of her coffee cans! Judy steamed the bread on a stovetop; it can also be steamed inside an oven.

In northern New England and points further north, where it was difficult to grow corn, hardy grains transplanted from the British Isles became more important, including oats and rye. Phil Zaret, who works with manuscripts at the Clements Library, gave us some background on the unpublished Maine cookbook where he found the rolled-oats bread recipe:

There were three Puffer sisters; two of them, Mary and Alice, wrote this cookbook. All three were teachers in the Boston public schools in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The family would spend the Summer in Maine, where the family had originally lived. The sisters loved cooking the traditional foods passed down by their grandmother. Shortly after the First World War, the sisters decided to open a roadside restaurant in Nobleboro, Maine. Their experiment lasted three years, but through competition and the building of big highways, they had to stop. They wrote out their recipes, about 75 of them, and Mary and Alice each wrote an essay— one about their family history and one about the restaurant. The manuscript was typed up but never published. Contemporary references indicate that the Second World War had begun and the sisters were reluctant to try to publish a cookbook that required many items that were being rationed.

### Sugar and Spice Were Not So Nice

Compared to native maple syrup, Old World sweeteners such as honey, molasses, and refined sugar were far more common in early New England, and considered more suitable as general sweeteners. Our Indian pudding, brown bread, Anadama bread, and rolled-oats bread all used molasses, or a combination of molasses and sugar. This raises a question: why were these two ingredients so plentiful in New England?

The answer is that molasses and sugar were part of a thriving *triangular trade* involving New England, West Africa, and the West Indies. The largest such enterprise was headed by the DeWolf family of Bristol, Rhode Island, in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Their vast fleet of ships transported roughly 10,000 slaves from Africa during 88 trans-Atlantic voyages. Most of the slaves were sold for money; hundreds more were kept by the DeWolfs to toil in Cuba, where the family had five plantations of coffee and sugar. The sugar works also supplied a by-product, molasses, for the DeWolf rum distillery in Bristol. Much of the sugar, molasses, and coffee was shipped to New England; much of the wealth accumulated in this lucrative trade was used to finance more slave expeditions to Africa; and many of the slaves who were purchased there with rum, tobacco, and other goods were sent to the plantations in Cuba.

As slave trading became more and more legally restricted by Spain and by the new United States, the DeWolf family, sensing that manufacturing was the enterprise of the future in the young

republic, switched to textile production in Rhode Island itself, mostly using ginned cotton shipped from Southern plantations. For more on the DeWolf story, see Thomas Norman DeWolf, *Inheriting the Trade: A Northern Family Confronts Its Legacy as the Largest Slave-Trading Dynasty in U.S. History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008), and the film adaptation, “Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North”.

Due to the triangular trade, and other sea-faring enterprises such as fishing and whaling, early New England was heavily involved in world commerce. This also helps explain the frequent use of tropical herbs and spices such as cinnamon, nutmeg, mace, ginger, cloves, allspice, and cayenne pepper, as well as Asian fruits (citrus, mango) and pickled relishes.

### Ye Olde Boston Bean Pot

Boston baked beans [Julie and Bob Lewis] were prepared with an adaptation of a James Beard recipe. The night before, navy-type dried beans are soaked in cold water or parboiled on the back of a stove. The next day they are baked for hours with salt pork, molasses, onion, and dry mustard.

Julie served the beans to us in a very old English stewpot. Fannie Farmer wrote that it was widely believed that baking in an “earthen bean-pot with small top and bulging sides” is essential for achieving the best result. But she went on to note that in case your treasured pot ever shatters, the beans will taste just as good baked in a five-pound lard pail!

Pease pottage, made with dried peas, had long been a staple back in England, but such peas weren’t hardy enough to grow well in colonial New England. The haricot beans of the New World, however, were easy to cultivate in fields and gardens. Along with the other two sisters mentioned earlier— maize (corn) and cucurbits (squashes and pumpkins)— these native crops formed a balanced food triangle, supplying energy, protein, and vitamins and minerals, respectively. As such, the plants represented three immense contributions to the global diet.

But why was it only in New England that beans became part of people’s very identity, a symbol of Yankee life? Religion seems to have played a key role. Among Puritans, work, including stoking a fire for cooking, was proscribed from sundown on Saturday until sundown on Sunday. A pot of baked beans, served with brown bread, made a convenient meal for Sabbath supper, breakfast, and lunch. Saturday was usually baking day for the week, and in the afternoon, after the bread was finished baking in a home kitchen or community bakery, the fire would be allowed to die down. A batch of beans could then be simmered in a stewpot kept in the lingering heat of the stove or solid brick oven. Some have argued that this custom was originally practiced for Saturday Sabbath by Jews in Amsterdam, with whom Boston ship captains were in frequent contact: see Edgar Rose, “The True Origins of Boston Baked Beans”, *Repast* 26:2 (Spring 2010), p. 2.

The earliest known published recipe for baked beans is from Lydia Maria Child’s *The American Frugal Housewife*, published in Boston in 35 editions between 1829 and 1850. Her recipe calls for a quart of dried beans simmered overnight, a little pepper, and a pound of streaky salt pork with a scored rind. On



baking day, these are boiled in a kettle of water for an hour, then transferred to a bean-pot and baked in the oven for 3-4 hours. Interestingly, there is no mention of molasses or sugar, even though these are called for in dozens of other recipes in Child's book. In fact, the luxury of adding molasses to baked beans, or other sweeteners such as maple syrup or brown or white sugar, was a custom that arose only later, in the second half of the 1800s.

Saturday night "bean suppers" at home, or in churches, grange halls, and firehouses, became widespread, not only in "Bean Town" but throughout the region. In *A Tramp Abroad*, his 1880 commentary from Europe, Hartford, Conn., resident Mark Twain included Boston baked beans among the American foods for which he most yearned during his travels overseas.

Many of the beans themselves were, and still are, grown in Maine. There, a number of different types of dried beans have been popular for the dish, such as kidney, soldier, and yellow-eyed beans. In 1875, a canned foods company called Burnham & Morrill (Portland, Maine), which was already canning seafood, bouillon, brown bread, and other items, became the first to can baked beans. The beans, with their famous "B & M" label, were originally for use by seamen aboard vessels of the firm's own fishing fleet, but they proved to be convenient and popular in many other workplaces and in homes. The old B & M bean-canning plant is still going strong. The canning companies, however, accelerated two trends in baked-bean taste: increasing sweetness and decreasing diversity.

#### Pahk the Cod in Hahvahd Yahd

Cod was the king of fish in New England. Commercial cod fishing began in Gloucester in 1623. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries the massive export of barrels of dry-salted cod helped create an "aristocracy", a wealthy merchant class centered in Boston.

Within New England, families dined on cod, usually salt cod, at a weekly meal. The fish was boiled and served with an interesting sauce, along with boiled vegetables such as beets, carrots, potatoes, turnips, or parsnips.

Leftover cod and potato were often used to make fish-balls or fish-cakes (croquettes) that were fried in a "spider" (frying pan) for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. In the 1800s it was common for cash-strapped Harvard students to seek out a local eatery where they could make an inexpensive meal of the fish-balls. Their plight was immortalized in a humorous song, "The Lay of the One Fish-Ball", which was written by a Latin professor at Harvard, George Martin Lane, and published in *Harper's* in July 1855. (Folk singer Josh White re-wrote it as "One Meat Ball" in the 1940s.)

Joanne and Art Cole met as students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, not at Harvard, but that hasn't kept them from appreciating codfish balls and everything else cod-related. The excellent codfish cakes they brought to our meal were made with *bacalao* (salt cod) purchased in Dearborn. The salty dry planks of cod have to be rejuvenated by repeated soakings and rinsings a day or more ahead. Following a recipe in Sandra L. Oliver's *Saltwater Foodways: New Englanders and Their Food, at Sea and Ashore, in the Nineteenth Century* (Mys-



Sonia Manchek's baked stuffed quahog clams. Photo: Mariam Breed.

tic, Conn., 1995), the Coles then cooked and minced the cod and combined it with mashed boiled potato, milk, salt, and pepper. They shaped this mixture into cakes, and fried them until golden brown.

Cod cakes are traditionally eaten with catsup, and the Coles supplied us with their favorite Red Gold brand from Indiana. Unsweetened tomato catsup caught on quite early in Maine and Massachusetts, especially among seafaring families who had contact with Spain or its colonies. It came to be the standard condiment for fish cakes, fried hash, and baked beans. Lydia Maria Child recommended adding a cup of tomato catsup to the pot when making fish chowder.

#### Digging Up the Story on Clams

Joanne Cole recounted the humorous story of a rift that occurred in her family when her sister Gail, returning home to Braintree from college one Summer, took a job working at Howard Johnson's. The eatery was locally despised because of its fried clams: they were bizarrely shaped, like long strips, because the soft central belly was removed from each clam before breading. (Joanne speculates that the bellies were used in clam chowder.)

Long before HoJo's or even the first arrival of Europeans, the hard-shell clams called quahogs were being harvested by the Narragansett tribes living around the bay of that name, in what is now Rhode Island. They often cooked the shellfish along the beach on fire-reddened stones. They also made use of the shells, crafting them into white and purple beads that could be used as decorative objects, as well as razors, in the *wampum* trade. The word "quahog" is our adaptation of the Algonquin *poquaũhock*, "round clam". Also common in New England are soft-shell ("Ipswich") clams and two smaller varieties of hard-shell clam, known as cherrystone and littleneck.

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Soon after they established Plymouth colony, British settlers learned how to dig up these clams, at first with their hands and spades, and later with the help of pigs. By the late 1800s the “clam bake”, and a variant called the “chowder party”, became common family and political rituals along the New England coast. The clambake was influenced by romanticized notions of the older Indian customs. Clams, along with items such as fish, oysters, crabs, sausage, tripe, corn, and sweet potatoes, would be layered with seaweed and steam-baked in a sandpit over large rocks that had been heated in a wood fire. Seaside resorts built beach pavilions that offered daily clambakes called “shore dinner parties”.

In the 1920s, these ways of enjoying clams were supplemented by inexpensive family restaurants, including takeout joints called “clam shacks”. In the 1930s and 1940s, the popularity of clams soared further after the region’s shallow-water oyster beds were decimated by unrelenting effluent and the 1938 hurricane.

Sonia Manchek regaled us with her authentic “stuffies” (baked stuffed clams), a classic street food in New England. She used fresh quahogs from Monahan’s Seafood Market in Ann Arbor, and a recipe from <http://simplyrecipes.com/>. Sonia steamed the shells open, minced and sautéed the clam meat with onions, garlic, and parsley, and combined this with bread crumbs and lemon and clam juices. She spooned the mixture into the shells, which were then topped with grated Parmesan cheese and baked for about 20 minutes until golden brown.

Either hard- or soft-shell clams can be used to make chowder, for which New England is justifiably famous. We had a sumptuous clam chowder [Sherry Sundling] at our meal, served with herbed croutons. Sherry adapted a recipe from Boston chef Jasper White’s *50 Chowders: One Pot Meals—Clam, Corn, & Beyond* (New York, 2000). Her ingredients included bacon and salt pork, red potatoes, celery, onions, garlic, parsley, thyme, bay leaf, and heavy cream.

Seafood chowders were being eaten in New England by the 1730s. These were thick stews prepared with ingredients commonly available aboard ships, such as salt pork, red wine, onions, and biscuits or crackers. Eventually the dish was adapted to landlubbers as a water-based soup, and only in the 1800s were ingredients such as milk, cream, potato, or tomato added. The tomato-based variety of clam chowder that is popular in Connecticut and Rhode Island was falsely derided as “Manhattan” clam chowder by scornful residents of Massachusetts.

#### The Contributions of Immigrants

In the 1800s, fresh waves of immigration exerted a great influence on New England cuisine. The most prominent groups included French-Canadian, Irish, Italian, Portuguese, Greek, Swedish, Polish, Lithuanian, Armenian, and Syrian immigrants. The culture and foodways that they brought to the region had been shaped over centuries, not only by their national affiliations but also by their religious beliefs, including Christian, Jewish, and Muslim.

A French-Canadian influence could be seen in the dish of string beans with lamb [Randy Schwartz and Mariam Breed], made with ingredients such as olive oil, onions, tomato paste, allspice, and oregano. The recipe, found in *Yankee Magazine’s First Annual Great New England Cook-off Cookbook* (Dublin, NH, 1987), was submitted by one M. E. Monsour of Woonsocket, R.I. Other classics of New England French-Canadian cooking include the *tourtière*, a ground-pork pie; *cipâte*, a casserole of mixed meats and vegetables with a biscuit topping; and *grands-pères*, dumplings in maple syrup.

About 600,000 French-Canadians migrated to New England between 1860 and 1900, mostly from failing farms in Quebec province. In the 1900 Census, this single immigrant group represented about 10% of the population of New England. The French-Canadians were attracted to factory towns such as Manchester, N.H., Lowell, Mass., and Woonsocket, R.I., all of which had prominent textile industries based on river-powered mills. There, the immigrants eked out a living by having several family members holding down jobs. A case study was made of a French-Canadian blacksmith’s assistant who was living with his wife and 11 children in a four-room tenement in Lowell in 1909. Their five combined incomes brought in \$29 a week. The family’s average weekly food expenses came to \$12.60, the bulk of it for 50 pounds of flour, 12 pounds of beef, and 4 pounds each of fish and pork (*Lowell: The Story of an Industrial City* [National Park Service, 1992], pp. 67-68).

Immigration from Italy and Portugal surged around the turn of the century. These new arrivals tended to settle in ethnic enclaves of industrial cities (Lowell, Lawrence, Taunton and Fall River in Massachusetts; New Haven and Hartford in Connecticut; and Providence, Bristol, and Pawtucket in Rhode Island) and in smaller fishing ports (New Bedford, Gloucester, and Provincetown, Mass.). A few examples of now-classic New England favorites that show their influence are: Italian *linguine* with clam sauce; *calamari* fried with garlic and tossed with hot peppers; *apizza*, the white clam pizza pie of New Haven; Italian *baccalà* and Portuguese *bacalhau* dishes; and the use of Portuguese *linguiça* and *chouriço* sausage in clam stuffings and in kale soup.

The Southern European immigrants also popularized eating vegetables fresh, and eating tomatoes every which way. Our Christmas salad [Rich Kato] had such a character, made with local lettuces, tomato and avocado, red and green peppers, and *zucchini*. During the Great Depression, when WPA writer Mari Tomasi interviewed Italian workers from the granite quarries of Barre, Vermont, she learned that about 50 families in that town were earning extra money by giving “Italian feeds”, meaning dinners served in their homes to paying guests. Tomasi described one feed in great detail, from the opening pasta course to the chicken *alla cacciatore*, and on to the final salad course:

At this stage of the feast the insalata arrives, offering a sharp and pleasant contrast to the early rich dishes. Strenuously exercised gustatory nerves carry new and delightful impulses from tongue to brain. The insalata is a light, aromatic salad of lettuce, endive, tomatoes, green peppers, onion— all tossed in chilled vinegar (usually a wine vinegar) and olive oil, and served from a bowl the sides of which have been rubbed to delicate fragrance with garlic. Contrary to common belief, the cook who prepares a true Italian feed uses that pungent bulb, garlic,



with no lavish hand, but with light epicurean artistry; she allows only a delicate breath of it to imbue the food, thus teasing the appetite, and transforming a dull mouthful into a tasty snack. (Mark Kurlansky, *The Food of a Younger Land* [New York, 2009], p. 54)

To us today, such a salad might seem fairly standard. But it would have seemed exotic in 1930s Vermont, where vegetables were often canned, and even lettuce and other fresh greens were usually eaten hot rather than in salads. Traditionally, greens were boiled with salt pork and served with hot vinegar and butter, or else minced and simmered in a broth thickened with flour and butter (p. 29). This is why the standard New England term for green vegetables was “garden sass”, i.e., sauce from the garden, eaten with a spoon.

Linda Bassett’s 2002 book, *From Apple Pie to Pad Thai: Neighborhood Cooking North of Boston*, focuses on immigrant contributions to the cuisine of the Gold Coast. Her WGBH-TV show on this subject (March 13, 2003) can be viewed for free at <http://forum-network.org/lecture/apple-pie-pad-thai>.

To Top It All Off

Our dessert table included a selection of regional favorites:

- Cranberry chiffon pie [Sherry Sundling] was adapted from “The Publick House’s Cranberry Chiffon Pie”, a recipe in Jonathan N. Leonard, ed., *American Cooking: New England* (Time-Life Foods of the World, 1970). The

crust is made of ground toasted pecans, butter, and sugar, while the filling, which is chilled rather than baked, is mostly gelatin, cranberry sauce, and sugar. The pie was topped with whipped cream, whole toasted pecans, and whole cranberries.

- Christmas cake [Jan and Dan Longone] was a delicious attempt to reproduce a type of pound cake made by one of Jan’s Yankee friends. It was based loosely on the Lemon-Cranberry Pound Cake recipe at the website <http://www.joyofbaking.com>, which calls for dried cranberries and cherries, pistachios, and sugar.
- Homemade whoopie pies [Lisa and Tony Putman] were improvised from a traditional recipe that was being taught to 7<sup>th</sup>-grade Home Economics classes in the Boston area c. 1970. This one-serving “pie” is actually more reminiscent of a cupcake. It consists of two palm-sized pieces of chocolate cake shaped like pitching mounds, sandwiching a sweet, white filling similar to a creamy icing. Other names for the confection include “gob”, “bob”, and “black-and-white”. It is believed to be of Pennsylvania German origin, although the name “Whoopie pie” is a mystery. Commercial production began in Lewiston, Maine (1925) and Roxbury, Mass. (1931). In 2011, Maine designated the Whoopie pie as the “official state treat”, and blueberry pie as the “official state dessert”. ■

**Below: A “Pie Circle” at work in 1877 in the Domestic Hall at Mount Holyoke, an all-female seminary college in South Hadley, Mass. To keep costs low and to teach useful skills and physical exercise, the school relied on Domestic Circles, which were groups of students organized to accomplish specific housekeeping tasks.**

Photo: Mt. Holyoke College Digital Collection rg24-2-seminary-building-4-3-9-2



Photo: Mariam Breed

**Above: Sherry Sundling’s version of Cranberry Chiffon Pie. She adapted a recipe from the Publick House (est. 1771), an inn and restaurant located in Sturbridge, Mass., 67 miles outside Boston on the old Post Road.**

# CHAA CALENDAR

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(Unless otherwise noted, programs are scheduled for 4-6 p.m. and are held at Ann Arbor Senior Center, 1320 Baldwin Ave.)

Sunday, April 15, 2012

3-5 p.m., Ann Arbor District Library,  
Malletts Creek Branch  
(3090 E. Eisenhower Parkway)  
Kathryn Lynch Underwood,  
City Planner, Detroit City Planning Commission,  
“Urban Agriculture in Detroit, Part II:  
Imagining the Future of Urban Agriculture in Detroit”

Sunday, April 22, 2012

3-5 p.m., Ann Arbor District Library  
(343 South Fifth Ave.)  
Culinary author, teacher, and historian  
Anne Willan,  
“The History of Early Cookbooks”

Sunday, May 20, 2012

Jan and Dan Longone, founders of  
the Janice Bluestein Longone Culinary Archive  
and of CHAA, “Reminiscences of Julia”  
(marking the centennial year of Julia Child’s birth)

REPAST  
1044 GREENHILLS DRIVE  
ANN ARBOR, MI 48105-2722



Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

Volume XXVIII Number 1, Winter 2012

*First Class*