Culinary Excursions

Part 2: Provincial France, Northern Thailand, Siberia and the Russian Far East

Le Goûter aux Champs (“The Taste of the Fields”), 1891, showing a young shepherdess, is by William-Adolphe Bouguereau, an academic painter from a family of wine and olive oil merchants in La Rochelle, France, on the Atlantic seaboard.
We at the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor are very pleased that two of our members have stepped forward to serve as the new Program Chair and Treasurer, respectively.

For the past 10 years, Laura Green Gillis has served as an outstanding Program Chair. We thank her for the great creativity and perseverance that she showed in arranging such a wide variety of fascinating programs and field trips over those years. Because of her background in the study of popular culture, her culinary training, her work with many local nonprofit organizations, and her employment at Zingerman’s and her other first-hand experience with the food scene in Michigan, Laura had a particular ability to tap into new trends around us that recall, rescue, or preserve the best historical traditions in producing and preparing food. Laura and her husband, Dan Gillis, have also been reliably active participants at CHAA events over all of these years.

Laura’s successor as CHAA Program Chair is Valerie Sobczak (pronounced SUB-chock), who lives on the Near West Side of Ann Arbor. Val became familiar with CHAA as a result of her work as a Library Technician based at the Malletts Creek branch of the Ann Arbor District Library, where CHAA holds its monthly programs. She began serving as host for the talks, became engrossed by them, helped out generously, and joined our group. Val is a student at Eastern Michigan Univ. and is planning a career as a museum conservator. This December, after more than five years at the AADL, she is leaving to take a new position working on Innovation Programming at The Henry Ford in Dearborn. Val is in touch with many exciting things happening in our area, both on campuses and in communities, and this is reflected in the CHAA programs since October that she has arranged. All of us should be ready to help by forwarding program ideas and contact information to Valerie, and by responding generously to her requests for assistance.

Daniel T. Longene is not only a CHAA co-founder and indispensable leading member along with his wife Jan, but in addition he has served loyally as CHAA Treasurer since its earliest days more than 30 years ago. The job takes a patient and meticulous person because it entails such tasks as coordinating the membership dues and roster (working closely with the Membership Secretary), overseeing payments for many different kinds of expenses, and handling our bank account and other financial matters. Dan, an Emeritus Prof. of Chemistry at the Univ. of Michigan, handled the job with remarkable aplomb—he has been unflappable! We thank him from the bottom of our hearts.

Dan’s successor as CHAA Treasurer is a familiar face and a very pleasant person: Judith A. Steeh, who served as our Co-President for nearly six years (2012-17) along with Joanne Nesbit. Judy is also handling our website duties. She is a science writer and technical editor, now mostly retired. Although born in Ann Arbor, she grew up in Mt. Clemens, MI, and lived for nine years in England and for six years in Kanazawa, Japan, where she was Head Editor at the Japan Advanced Institute of Science and Technology. Back in Ann Arbor, she was employed for many years with the Univ. of Michigan’s News and Information Services. As a volunteer she has worked on the menu collection at UM’s Janice Bluestein Longone Culinary Archive and assisted the local AAUW chapter with its huge annual fundraising book sale. Judy lives in Ann Arbor’s Burns Park area with her husband, Bob DiGiovanni, and they enjoy travel and other pursuits.

This might also be a good time to profusely thank CHAA member Robert E. Lewis for his ongoing decades of service as proofreader for Repast, which is another one of those tasks that requires a patient and meticulous person. Bob and his wife Julie (CHAA President in 1989-99 and Program Chair in 2002-09) continue to live in Ann Arbor and, despite frequent travel, are still able to attend CHAA gatherings from time to time. Bob, who also has written articles for Repast, is a Univ. of Michigan Prof. Emeritus of English Language and Literature and Exec. Dir. Emeritus of UM’s Middle English Dictionary Project.
REGIONAL CUISINES OF FRANCE:
A HANDS-ON TOUR

Last July 14, Bastille Day, the Culinary Historians chose to honor the 230th anniversary of modern France. But instead of a military parade—with tanks rolling through the streets and fighter jets shrieking overhead—we opted for a festive meal that turned out to be diverse, engaging, and thought-provoking. It was held inside the clubhouse of the Ladies’ Literary Club of Ypsilanti, a well-preserved 1840s Greek-revival mansion.

Nearly 40 members and friends of the CHAA participated in the event, selecting and preparing dishes from diverse parts of the country. Then, with stomachs growling, we assembled in the late afternoon and took turns briefly explaining what we’d prepared before sitting down to sample the dishes.

We Were All Over the Map—of France

We must thank CHAA member Phil Zaret and facility caretaker Jennie Taylor for their work in planning and organizing—the mise-en-place of the meal. Joanne Nesbit was the emcee who administered the challenging after-meal quiz about French regional cuisine and who awarded the prizes—cookbooks and kitchen implements that were coveted the way a French chef covets Michelin stars. Congratulations to Len Sander, who won the top prize with a score of 22 out of 40. Randy Schwartz, who had suggested the French theme for the meal, also created the quiz and donated the prizes.

As the centerpiece for our main buffet table, Dan and Jan Longone lent a Michelin Man truck ornament, which somehow they had bagged on one of their many trips to France and had spirited back across the Atlantic. This character symbolizes the French tire company that has been publishing, every January since 1900, the famous red Guide Michelin, the oldest European hotel and restaurant reference guide. The Michelin rating can severely affect a restaurant, a fact highlighted this year when Marc Veyrat, chef-owner of La Maison des Bois in the Haute-Savoie region, actually sued Michelin for downgrading him from three stars to two. Explaining the impetus behind his lawsuit, he told the media outlet Franceinfo: “I’ve been dishonored. My team, I saw them cry.”

We had vowed that our feast would honor not just Paris but the various regional cuisines of France, each of which has its own distinctive terroir and style. Since so many regions of the country were represented, our meal felt like a grand tour of the gastronomic landscape, comparing cuisines across time and space. And we didn’t even have to leave Michigan for it.

Below, we take the opportunity to record the rich lessons drawn out of the experience. Since so much can be learned from such a meal, it would be criminal to do otherwise—now that would be something to cry over!

The Fruits of Normandy and Brittany

Much of northwestern France is gently rolling countryside, and the Atlantic brings a moderating influence to its climate. The terrain is not suitable for vineyards, but parts are suited to crops of wheat and buckwheat, cattle herds, tree-fruit orchards, and fishing from the coast or from rivers. Accordingly, the famous food products of this region include bread, crêpes, galettes, pastries and puddings, beer, sea salt, and various dishes made with dairy products (milk, buttermilk, butter, cream, and cheese), beef, poultry, seafood, apples, pears, plums, or cherries. Many dishes are traditionally cooked in cream or in lard.

The famous crêpes of Breton (Brittany) are often made with buckwheat flour. Crêpes are thin pancakes made in a buttered special frying pan. The custom spread throughout France in the 1920s, thanks largely to the restaurants called crêperies. Elsewhere in France the crêpe is generally made from wheat flour. But buckwheat (the French term is blé noir, “black wheat”), introduced to Western Europe in the 1400s, grows more easily than wheat in the sandy Breton soil. In addition, in olden times ovens required large quantities of high-quality wood, which was scarce in Brittany. Thus, the peasant staples were crêpes, porridges, and puddings (all made of buckwheat), rather than bread.

The far Breton, brought to our meal by Jane Wilkinson and Howard Ando and their guest, Gail Hubbard, is a dense pudding of wheat flour, eggs, and sugar, and featuring one type of fruit; Jane used brandy-soaked prunes. It is baked to a burnt-looking appearance that belies its delicious taste. The far is similar to the more famous, cherry-studded clafoutis of Limousin (to the southeast), and might have influenced the development of the English sweet pudding. But the original version of far Breton, many centuries old and sometimes still made in the region, is a savory pudding of buckwheat flour, cooked in a sac in boiling water; it was often part of the Sunday meal. The evolution of far Breton is thus an example of the modernization of French cooking.

Poulet sauté vallée d’auge (chicken in the style of the Auge Valley region) [brought by Sherry Sundling] is a famous, elegant dish from the Pays d’Auge, an area in Normandy straddling the departments of Calvados and Orne. Sherry used a recipe from her 1960s Detroit-area culinary mentor, Madame Charity deVicq Suczek, about whom she has written in Repast (Sundling, 2013). She browned the pieces of chicken in butter, gave them the flambée treatment with Calvados brandy, then simmered them in hard apple cider along with chopped onion, apple, celery, and herbs. Once the cooking was complete she added an egg-cream mixture to the

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Sherry Sundling’s tarte de pommes à la normande (Normandy apple tart) with whipped cream. Our word dessert is derived from the French verb desservir, meaning “to clear the table of dishes” in order to make way for a different course.

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Pan juices to create a thick white sauce, strained this over the chicken, and presented the dish with a garnish of fresh parsley and accompanied by buttered noodles.

Normandy is famous for cidre, pommeau, Calvados, and other beverages made from its hundreds of varieties of apple. Cider pressed from the red Calville apple, most notably in the Pays d’Auge region, is distilled into a famous apple brandy called Calvados. It was often used as a morning wake-me-up by workingmen. The trou normand, or “Norman gap”, is a traditional pause between meal courses in order to have a glass of Calvados, which stimulates the appetite for the next course.

Sherry also used Calvados to make an outstanding tarte de pommes à la normande (Normandy apple tart). Following a recipe from Anne Willan (1982), she made a frangipane flavored with Calvados and spread it on her pastry shell, then covered this with thin slices of Golden Delicious apple fanned out artistically. (Frangipane is a French almond-flavored pastry cream, with a flavor similar to that of marzipan; it was being used in haute pâtisserie by the 1600s.) She topped the baked tart with melted sugar and an apricot glaze, and served it with whipped cream. It was devoured quickly!

For her apple tart, Sherry used the basic type of pastry dough that is found throughout France in sweet and savory pies and in wrapping pâtés: a rich shortcrust dough made with wheat flour, butter, sometimes egg yolk (as in this tart), cold water, and salt. Historically, making the dough with butter (or lard) was a great improvement over the ancient Roman variety made with olive oil, since the former gives the dough a stiff strength that it retains when baked into a crust. However, in contrast to the Anglo-American tradition of placing the flour and other ingredients in a bowl and “cutting” the butter into pea-sized pieces with a pair of knives, a French cook will place the flour on a board, make a well in it for the other ingredients, and use their fingers to gradually draw in the flour and mix together. Then, after re-flouring the board, pieces of the soft dough are each shoved against it with the heel of a hand in a long, sliding motion. The baked dough that results is soft, crumbly, and tender, called pâte brisée (“broken-textured dough”).

A tarte like Sherry’s, or its smaller version, tartelette, is always open-faced, the fruit itself being the decoration. A galette is similar to a tarte, but broader and quite shallow. A deeper, more substantial pie with a double crust is usually called a tourte or tourtelet.
Mariam Breed

Laura Gillis’s petites meringues just before they were filled with the chicolle, wine-macerated strawberries typical of the Loire Valley. Behind them is the Potager cookbook where Laura found the recipe.

A terrine de foies de volaille (chicken liver pâté) [Gwen and John Nystuen] was based on a recipe from Julia Child (1981), who recommended it as an appetizer for a hot-weather meal: In such weather, she wrote, “What’s called for, I think, is contrast and stimulus: hot and cold, sharp and bland, crunchy and creamy.” Gwen sautéed the chicken livers with minced onion, then puréed them with butter, cream cheese, aspic, wine, herbs, and spices, and molded it in her favorite frog shape before chilling. She served the pâté on a bed of cresson (watercress) and accompanied it with toasted slices of baguette.

The baguette, popular all over France today, is actually a relative latecomer to the French table. In his brilliant survey of French cuisine, Edward Behr (Winter 1998) wrote that round loaves of refined white bread had first become popular in Paris and the rest of northern France in the late 1700s, made possible by a new technology for sifting flour. In 1838 August Zang, a young baker who had immigrated to Paris from Vienna, improved the loaves dramatically by making them lighter and removing the sour taste. The trick was to use imported flour and several Viennese techniques: he replaced levain (wild-yeast sourdough) with commercial beer yeast, added milk to the dough for a richer, softer crumb, and used an oven that infused steam, promoting airy expansion of the loaf during baking and the formation of a thin, crackling crust. The famously perishable baguette, baked in the shape of a baton, arose in Paris in the late 1800s, didn’t ascend to its “classic” form until the 1930s, and reached rural areas only in the 1960s-1970s. As of early 2018, France has about 25,000 boulangeries (bakeries), a decrease of about one-third since 25 years ago; about 5% of these bakeries are in Paris.

The Loire is the Garden of France

The Central Loire Valley, especially the region surrounding Tours, has been traditionally referred to as le jardin de la France (“the garden of France”). Tours is famous for its French beans, and Saumur for its potatoes, shallots, and mushrooms—the Musée du Champignon, or Museum of the Mushroom, is located there. A strong heritage in Tours, Le Mans, and Anjou is rillettes de porc, a type of confit; the finely minced and shredded pork is cooked in lard with seasonings, then stored in a crock. During the Winter the rillettes can be eaten on bread as a simple meal, with pickles on the side.

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There were a few Loire sweets gracing our dessert table, including *chicolle* (wine-macerated strawberries) served in homemade little *meringues* ([Laura and Dan Gillis], 2000). To make the miniature *meringues*, she beat egg whites with salt, cream of tartar, and sugar into a foam, then spooned portions of this onto a baking sheet. She used the spoon to make a well in each disk before baking them for one hour at 250° F. The resulting light-brown, airy shells were still dry and crisp until just before serving, when Laura filled them with a strawberry marinade. The fresh berries had been macerated and chilled in a mixture of red wine, lemon juice, sugar, and thyme. These wine-macerated strawberries are called *chicolle* in the Loire Valley, where they are most popular.

*Cœur à la crème aux framboises* (i.e., with raspberries) ([Celeste and Jim Novak]) is from the Anjou region of the lower Loire valley, just east of Brittany. This is an unbaked dessert combining cream cheese, heavy cream, and sugar, flavored with vanilla. It is formed in a mold (traditionally heart-shaped, as the name *coeur* implies), then turned upside-down on a plate where it may be surrounded with fruit, in this case fresh raspberries. Celeste made two different versions: one from the Barefoot Contessa (a nickname of the chef Ina Garten) and the other from Betty Crocker (a nickname from General Mills).

### The Rise and Fall of Les Halles

For centuries, visitors to France marveled how the culinary resources of the whole nation were concentrated in the capital, Paris. Virtually all of the leading foodstuffs, eateries, and *connoisseurs* could be found there, a phenomenon not present in many other countries.

With regard to foodstuffs, the quality and freshness of ingredients is a key factor affecting the development and refinement of a nation’s cuisine. That reflects *terroir*, agricultural husbandry, and culinary craftsmanship, but it also reflects the depth of “culinary discourse”, the thinking and discussion about food that goes on everywhere—in kitchens, markets, restaurants, and on the printed page. The French are famously discriminating as food shoppers. Many of them agreed with the chef Jean Troisgros (1926-83) when he would say, “Cooking is three-quarters shopping.”

Les Halles, the vast, crowded fresh-food market of Paris, was closed 50 years ago in 1969. The market had begun in the year 1110 or so, when King Louis VI granted to some peasant women the right to set up fish stalls outside his palace. In subsequent years other merchants paid the monarch to get their own share of space, and by 1137 the food market, at 21 acres, had become the world’s largest. In 1183, King Philippe-Auguste enlarged it still further and built two house-like structures (halles) to provide some shelter. The monarchy began to set price controls on key foodstuffs so as to widen their accessibility. As the food scholar Sydney Watts (1999) put it, the royal policy was “to consistently provide a sufficient quantity of necessary staple foods for the greatest number of Parisians at a fair price.”

Les Halles, nicknamed “the belly of Paris”, would play an important role in the excellence of French cuisine. It encouraged the livelihood of itinerant food vendors and the rise of specialized, professional food shops in the capital; even today, Paris neighborhoods are full of specialty shops that offer prepared foods. For centuries the Île-de-France region, which includes Paris, has been famous for the quality of its fruits, vegetables, and other produce (notably lettuces, tomatoes, mushrooms, onions, radishes, and turnips), as well as meats, sausages, and cheeses. Food growers and artisans competed to bring to the huge central market fresh produce and other foodstuffs that were of the highest possible quality, because these would command the highest prices in the constant haggling with customers. Farmers and fishermen hauled in their wares on animal-drawn wagons, and the buying and selling began before dawn. Purchasers included retail middlemen as well as chefs, housewives, and other cooks. A major upgrade of the facility, carried out in 1854-66 on orders from Emperor Napoléon III, involved the construction of 10 long pavilions of metal and glass—the first exposed-steel structures in Paris. Naturally, many restaurants flourished on the edges of the market; they were notable both for their excellent cooking and for their ample portions.

The rise of industrial food production after World War 2 (see, for instance, Michel Bosquet’s “Libby’s en Languedoc” [1963]) undercut the centrality of Les Halles, and in 1969 the pavilions were razed and the market was replaced by a modern, truck-fed, wholesaling facility nine miles south, in the city of Rungis. The market at Rungis caters to large-scale middlemen, who buy foodstuffs there from throughout the region and sell them elsewhere in Europe. It almost goes without saying that the character of food produced for such international transport is quite different from what used to be produced for local consumption.

String beans (*haricots verts*) have been loved throughout France ever since the Columbian Exchange, and those from Bagnolet, on the eastern outskirts of Paris, were the ones most prized in Les Halles before its closure. Representing Paris at our meal was a delicious *salade des haricots verts, amandes, et jambon cru* (salad of green beans with almonds and dry-cured ham) ([Valerie Sobezak and Caleb Greniewicki], 2007). Val used a recipe from Clotilde Dusoulier (2007), but substituted Old World almonds for the New World pecans. The ham is shredded for the salad, and the dressing is a French vinaigrette.

The hams of Paris are another good example of how French culinary attitudes and practices evolved over the course of time. In the Middle Ages, when a Ham Fair was being held annually in Paris, smoked ham was the most prized form of pork in the capital. But local tastes shifted when the Enlightenment brought a rationalist outlook and technical advances. In the 1600s a “science of the table”, known as *la
gastronomie française, arose in the City of Light. Instead of smoking a leg of pork, the charcutier would cook it in a brine with spices, then de-bone it and press it into a rectangular mold. The result, still known as le jambon blanc de Paris (“the white ham of Paris”), was often presented at the dining table festively in its own jelly (en gelée) and with the rind intact (CNAC Île-de-France, pp. 105-107). Needless to say, in recent decades Parisian preferences have shifted further!

The Porcine Wonders of Alsace-Lorraine

Early on, pork breeding was taken to a high level in Alsace through the labors of Benedictine monks. While cow’s-milk butter was the traditional cooking medium in a region that includes most of the north of France and a couple of strips running southward (one down the Atlantic coast as far as Bordeaux, the other down the intermountain area as far as Lyon), animal fats, especially those of pigs, ducks, and geese, found wider use than butter in the Alsace-Lorraine region in northeastern France and in the country’s Massif Central (central plateau). Meanwhile, olive oil still dominates Provence and Nice in the southeast, with their Mediterranean terroir. These “culinary domains” were identified in a celebrated work by Wavel Root (1958), in which he argued that cooking-fat is what ultimately shaped the cuisine of each French region.

Since much of Alsace-Lorraine has switched back and forth between French and German possession over the centuries, it’s not surprising to find the two cultures deeply intermingled in the cuisine there, and often in the culinary terms themselves. The well-known French term quiche is related to the German kuchen, “cake”. The local term for sauerkraut, choucroute, was formed when German surkrut encountered French chou (cabbage).

The world’s most famous sauerkraut dish is the choucroute garnie [Joanne Neshbit] of Strasbourg, in Alsace. This is a platter of hot sauerkraut festively “garnished” with the pork and other products with which it has been stewed. Traditionally, the cook places the sauerkraut in a pot with white wine and/or chopped apple, and various cuts of smoked pork and sausage, along with either lard or goose fat, and she bakes this in an oven for several hours, often au gratin. With the rise of brasserie restaurants in the 1800s, choucroute garnie became popular in all of France. Joanne used a recipe from the Allrecipes website that calls for boneless pork chops, kielbasa, bacon, potatoes, Granny Smith apples, and brown sugar.

The choucroute is an example of a genre of dishes known as plats mijotés, which are main dishes cooked slowly and for a long time, whether on a stovetop or in an oven. The genre includes stews (ragoûts, civets, fricassées, cassoulets, gibelottes, matelotes, estouffades, etc.), braises (braises, daubes, etc.), and pot-roasts (poêlage). These humble dishes stand at a pole opposite from the climactic à point creations that are prepared, symphony-like, for a special occasion or in a great dining establishment.

Exhibit on Food and the French Enlightenment

Toronto’s Gardiner Museum has created “Savour: Food Culture in the Age of Enlightenment”, a multifaceted exhibit that explores how food and dining were transformed in France and elsewhere in Europe during the Age of Enlightenment, and how these profound changes still resonate today. After a run at the Gardiner Museum (Oct. 17, 2019 to Jan. 19, 2020), the exhibit will tour to the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, Connecticut.

What many of us eat, the way food is cooked, and how we dine continue to be influenced by radical changes that occurred in France from 1650 until the French Revolution in 1789. This exhibit traces that transformation with rare objects, fascinating histories, and amusing stories. It conjures up the kitchen gardens at Versailles where advances in horticulture expanded the growing seasons of vegetables and fruits, making a greater selection of foods available year-round. It displays other food-related results of the era’s science and technology, including newly invented tablewares of ceramic and silver, such as sauceboats and tureens. It visits the steamy kitchens of cooks who advocated light, flavorful cuisine, and reveals surprisingly modern philosophies for healthy eating and vegetarianism that arose centuries ago. Along the way, it explores how social changes were impacting eating then, just as now, as the grand formality of the past was often abandoned in favor of informality and intimacy.

“Savour: Food Culture in the Age of Enlightenment” displays works of art and objects from major North American museums and private collections, as well as key pieces of contemporary ceramics and knitted art. It is curated by Meredith Chilton, C.M., Curator Emerita at the Gardiner Museum. She has also written the accompanying cookbook, The King’s Peas: Delectable Recipes and Their Stories from the Age of Enlightenment. Throughout the exhibition, the museum’s CLAY restaurant is featuring special menu items inspired by the book.

Tarte alsacienne au fromage blanc [Miriam and Larry Imerman], sometimes called mangel, is a sugar-sweetened Alsatian cheese tart with pâte à choux on the bottom. The filling is made with milk, fresh farmer’s cheese (fromage blanc), heavy cream or crème fraîche, eggs, flour, and sugar. Miriam used a recipe from Paul Bocuse (1991).

Preparing pâte à choux differs from the earlier-mentioned pâte brisée in that the butter, water (or milk), and flour are cooked together before the eggs are beaten in. This makes a dough that has lots of air bubbles and is very soft and smooth rather than sticky. When baked, it rises a lot, becoming spongy, delicate, and light. Raw pâte à choux can also be piped through a pastry bag (invented in the early 1800s), enabling a pâtissier or amateur to make crafty objects for the oven.
The Beef of Burgundy Won Lyon and Paris

Bourgogne (Burgundy) is noted for the richness of its cuisine, whether haute or bourgeois. Fine beef, pork, chicken, escargots (snails), truffles, mushrooms, cherries, wines, vinegars, and vinegar preserves (such as mustard and cornichons, or pickle gherkins) are a few of the ingredients of which it boasts. Dijon, which was already an internationally-recognized center of gastronomy in the 1400s, has organized the nation’s oldest and grandest gastronomical fair since the early 1920s, today drawing crowds of over 200,000 people every Fall. The Commanderie des Cordons Bleus de France, founded in Dijon in 1949, plays the leading role in popularizing and advocating for French gastronomy domestically and internationally. Elsewhere in Burgundy, in the city of Beaune, France’s premiere wine auction is held annually in a magnificent Renaissance building.

Burgundy is also the place of origin of an outstanding breed of beef cattle, le Charolais. In the 1700s, this variety was bred to the quality needed to prevail at the great fresh-food market of Lyon. The cattle were pastured in a type of grass with a parsley fragrance, and their meat was tender and delicious. After the Charolais was named the superior breed at the 1867 Exposition Universelle (World’s Fair) in Paris, it spread rapidly, and it remains the most widespread cattle breed in France today.

Bœuf à la Bourguignonne [Randy Schwartz and Mariam Breed] is the famous flour-thickened stew of cubed beef with browned little onions and mushrooms, minced carrot, shallot, and garlic, a bouquet garni of herbs, tomato paste, and red wine. Randy and Marlam followed a recipe from the Time-Life Provincial France cookbook (Fisher and Child, 1968) and accompanied it with white rice. For their cooking wine, they used an imported bottle of Bourgogne Pinot Noir, a name that is regulated under the French government certification system known as appellation d’origine contrôlée (AOC).

Bœuf à la Bourguignonne is one of a range of mijoté dishes from this region that are prepared by stewing the main ingredients in a rich, reduced sauce made with red wine, small onions, shallots, mushrooms, and lardons (pork fat). Such dishes are said to be cooked en meurette (literally “in death”, referring to the blood-red color); other examples include œufs au vin (poached eggs), coq au vin (rooster), lapin en meurette (rabbit), and cervelle de veau (calf’s brain). Elsewhere in France, the phrase en meurette is often replaced with à la Bourguignonne.

Samuel Chamberlain’s book Clémentine in the Kitchen, which grew out of his pseudonymous column in Gourmet magazine, observed the ways of his family’s Burgundian cook in the 1930s. In it, he rightly described bœuf à la Bourguignonne as “a peasant dish, if you will, but fit for any patrician palate”, an example of “[t]he French housewife’s genius in making a commonplace stew into something exotic and supremely flavorful” (Chamberlain, 2001, p. 89). The dish shows the peasant custom of flavoring dishes with aromatic herbs and mild vegetables, such as onion, mushroom, and carrot. This practice worked its way up into haute cuisine.
where it was codified in a pathbreaking cookbook, *Le Cuisinier François* (1651), written by a Burgundian chef, François Pierre de La Varenne. In fact, this was the first French book to give instructions for cooking vegetables! In addition, it championed butter-based sauces, which had previously been disdained as a peasant vulgarity.

In calling for the use of milder, more humble ingredients, La Varenne also realized that serving foods with spicy, sour, or sweet flavors, which had been mainstays of medieval and Renaissance cuisine, interfered with the flavors of the wines that would be a central part of gastronomie française. It was during La Varenne’s era that French cuisine—possibly earlier than any other—began to segregate sweets as a separate course at the end of the meal. In fact, the French (and eventually English) word *dessert* is derived from the verb *desservir*, meaning “to clear the table of dishes” in order to make way for a different course.

We were sampling another typical Burgundian food when we tried the pleasant *gougères aux herbes* [Valerie Sobczak and Caleb Grenewicki]. These savories are made from *pâte à choux* (discussed earlier) flavored with cheese. They are baked briefly in a disk shape (traditionally about 4 inches in diameter) until puffy and golden, and served hot or at room temperature. Val used Gruyère cheese, added rosemary and thyme for a piquant element that complements the cheese, and halved the diameter for an appetizer size. This pastry, and its alternative names, have gone through a complex evolution since medieval times. By the late 1800s and early 1900s, the *gougère* was typically baked in a ring shape, with diced Gruyère both inside and atop, and it was a bourgeois custom in Burgundy for a family to share one at the end of Sunday lunch (CNAC Bourgogne, pp. 73-76). As an aside, the biggest-selling of the 45 AOC cheeses of France is Gruyère. It is made in Franche-Comté, a cousin to Swiss Gruyère. It is made in Franche-Comté, which separates Burgundy from Switzerland.

Women Hold Their Own in the Rhône

Earlier, we noted that 2019 marks the 50th anniversary of the end of Les Halles—but on a cheerier note, the same year (1969) saw the publication of *Ma Gastronomie*, a cookbook based on notes and handwritten recipes left by the great chef Fernand Point (1897-1955). In 1924 he had founded the Restaurant De La Pyramide, located in Vienne (on the east bank of the Rhône River, near Lyon), which was widely considered the leading restaurant in France from the 1920s through the 1950s. It, along with other restaurants in the region such as Bocuse, Troisgros, and Pic, have helped make the gastronomy of Lyon and the Rhône Valley world-famous.

Upon Fernand Point’s death, his widow, Mado, took the reins of La Pyramide in admirable fashion and was able to maintain its 3 Michelin stars for many years. Indeed, it’s easy to overlook the fundamental role of women in regional gastronomy. French terms such as *chef*, *boulanger*, *boucher*, and *pâtissier* traditionally referred to men only, yet countless numbers of classic French dishes were derived, sometimes with a bit of added refinement, from those made by women in home kitchens; we’ve already seen examples in *choucroute garnie* and *veau à la Bourguignonne*.

Sometimes, the transition was so direct that a male chef would acknowledge drawing a dish from his own mother’s repertoire. Louis Diat is an example. He worked at the original Ritz in Paris as a young man before winding up as master chef at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in New York. When he created, in 1917, *crème vichyssoise glacée*, an elegant version of cold potato soup, the name harkened back to his upbringing in a small town near Vichy about 100 miles west of Lyon in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region, where his mother used to make a chilled, milk-enriched version of plain, leftover *soupe bonne femme*.

Another example of this phenomenon is Jacques Pépin’s version of *poulet à la crème* [Anique and Golam Newaz]. This dish of chicken parts pan-cooked in a creamy sauce is considered the crowning glory of Bourg-en-Bresse, a small city 43 miles north-northeast of Lyon. That is partly because of the renowned yellow-fleshed Bresse chicken, a local AOC product resulting from specific techniques of feeding and husbandry that go back about 300 years (described in CNAC Rhône-Alpes, pp. 460-464). Another factor is the quality of Bresse cow’s butter and cream, famous since the early 1800s; Bresse cream is ideal for the thickening or “binding” (liaison) of sauces, since it does not separate when heated. Anique adapted a recipe from Jacques Pépin (2016)—but that recipe was itself adapted from that of his mother, chef-owner of a small Lyon restaurant, Le Pélican. As Pépin explained in the cookbook:

> Chicken in a cream sauce is a specialty of the town where I was born, Bourg-en-Bresse. My mother’s simple recipe included a whole cut-up chicken with water, a dash of flour, and a bit of cream to finish. I have added white wine and mushrooms to make the dish a bit more sophisticated, and used chicken thighs, which are the best part of the chicken… A sprinkling of chopped tarragon at the end makes it more special, but it is optional. I am not sure my mother would approve of my changes, but this is easy, fast, and good. Most of the time, my mother served hers with rice pilaf.

A second creamy chicken-and-mushroom dish at our meal was a version of *crêpes florentine* [Bob and Marcella Zorn] from the food critic Craig Claiborne (1920-2000). The recipe, which seems to show the influence of Claiborne’s training in Lausanne, Switzerland, appeared in his article “Crepes without Suzette” (*New York Times*, Apr. 19, 1970) and the following year in his *New York Times International Cookbook* (Claiborne, ed., 1971). In this dish, the wheat *crêpes* are rolled around a filling made with chopped chicken, spinach, mushrooms, shallots, and a roux-based sauce rich with milk, cream, and nutmeg. These filled *crêpes* are placed in a casseroles dish, along with lots of additional sauce and grated Gruyère and Parmigiano-Reggiano cheeses, then oven-baked for about half an hour.

> Pain de compagne (country bread) [Phil and Barbara Zaret] is a tan-colored peasant loaf from Grenoble in the Rhône-Alpes region. Traditionally it is baked as a large miche (round loaf), made from a combination of white flour and
whole wheat or rye flour, with a non-commercial sourdough-type levain (leavening) of yeast and bacteria. For convenience at our large meal, Phil baked his loaf in a baguette shape easily sliced. He followed a recipe from Bernard Clayton, Jr. (1978) that calls for whole wheat flour, wheat germ, buttermilk, vinegar, and ascorbic acid.

In discussing such pain au levain, James MacGuire (2009) noted that professional village bakers typically favored a large loaf (2-12 pounds), enough to feed a family for about a week. Much of it—perhaps most of it—was consumed in sopping up soups and sauces, and rural people often preferred this bread when it was days old rather than fresh. In former times, farmers would grow wheat, rye, and sometimes other grains in the same field as a kind of insurance against bad weather; bread was commonly made from a mixture of wheat and rye, called mèteil in French, and “meslin” or “maslin” in English. Huge amounts of leavening were used in bread: in his treatise Le Parfait Boulanger (1778), Antoine-Augustin Parmentier recommended that the dough should be one-third fresh levain, or else one-half levain de pâte (pre-fermented dough kept from the previous batch).

Deliciously fresh from the oven were two regional versions of madeleines salées (savory madeleines) [Glenda Bullock]. The madeleine, which most likely originated in the Lorraine region in the 1700s, is a very small sponge cake of génoise, a type of batter made with flour, butter, and eggs, and normally flavored with sugar and vanilla. It is baked in a special pan that gives it a distinctive shell-like shape. Glenda’s savory version with rosemary and Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese used a recipe from Patricia Wells’s cookbook (2004), which in turn was inspired, Wells tells us, by the well-known Restaurant Pic in Valence (capital of the Drôme department, on the Rhône about 60 miles south of Lyon). Glenda made a second version with chopped black Kalamata olives, herbs, and Parmigiano-Reggiano, using a recipe contributed to the New York Times website by a reader in Manhattan, “Rôtisserie Georgette”. Incidentally, Nyons, also in Drôme, is famous for an eponymous AOC variety of black olive and is home to L’Institut du Monde de l’Olivier (The Institute of the World of Olive Trees), an information resource center founded in 1996.

Provence: Where Olive Oil is King

Yes, we’ve already started to pop some olives in our mouths, but not until we hit Provence have we finally followed the Rhône far enough southward toward its mouth to feel the warm, sunny climate of the French Mediterranean. In case you’ve never visited, this land has glorious splashes of color from poppies, citrus, cypress, olive, fig, apricot, almond, tomato, and aubergine (eggplant). The air is fragrant with lavender, basil, savory, marjoram, rosemary, thyme, oregano, and garlic, which helped make the phrase herbes de provence so famous. Let’s stop—what a great place for a pique-nique!

It was in ancient times that Greek and Phoenician colonists first brought the cultivation of olives and grapes to the French seacoast here. The phrase à la grecque (literally “in the Greek style”) is a generic term for a dish cooked in olive
oil and served cold. As an hors-d’oeuvre, our feast included champignons à la grecque (marinated mushrooms) [Judy Pasich]. Adapting a recipe in the Time-Life Provincial France cookbook (Fisher and Child, 1968), Judy boiled the mushrooms in a marinade of chicken stock, dry white wine, olive oil, lemon juice, and herbs, then chilled the whole mixture in the refrigerator. She garnished the dish gorgeously with fresh parsley and lemon slices.

The current name of this region, Provence, evolved from Provincia Romana, the label assigned to it when it was established as the first Roman province beyond the Alps. Later, it was ruled by Italian-speaking aristocrats through much of the Middle Ages until its incorporation into France in 1486. The traditional bread of Provence is the fougasse, related to the Italian focaccia; the words are derived from an ancient Roman phrase for a flatbread baked in ashes. Modern fougasse is a flat, round loaf with holes slashed by the baker, and often lightly studded with olives, cheese, and garlic or other herbs.

Fricassée de poulet au vin blanc, câpres, et olives [Rita Goss and Dona Reynolds] is chicken fricassee with white wine, capers, and olives. Remember, we’re now in the land where olive oil is king, and dishes such as this one are obedient subjects! Rita used a recipe from Wells’s book (2004), browning the parts of a whole chicken in olive oil for five minutes before stewing them for an hour in the same skillet, mijoté-style with white wine, sliced onion, green olives, capers, and ripe tomatoes that were peeled, seeded, and chopped. Fricassée in modern French cuisine refers to a dish in which the pieces of meat (usually poultry) and vegetable are browned in oil or butter, then stewed for a long time in one or more liquids that will reduce to a light-colored, flavorful sauce. Such liquids could include white stock, white wine, or vinegar. Cream and/or egg yolks are sometimes added at the end of the stewing.

Gratin de légumes [Howard Ando, Jane Wilkinson, and Gail Hubbard] is a Provençal dish of roasted vegetables. Howard made his in a rectangular casserole using artistically-layered slices of eggplant and red bell pepper, along with sweet cherry tomatoes, onion, garlic, and other herbs. The term gratin, often misconstrued by Americans to mean “grated cheese”, refers to the crust created by roasting food in an oven or under a grill. Many French gratin dishes get their golden-brown crusts from the intense heat alone, without the addition of cheese or breadcrumbs. It was an old custom in French towns that on Sundays on the way to church, families would stop at the local boulangerie (bakery) with a piece of meat or seafood, to be roasted there and picked up later on the way home. The baker would position these foods on racks in his wood-burning four banal (communal oven), while casserole dishes filled with, say, sliced potatoes, leeks, and a bit of water, would be strategically placed below them to catch the dripping juices and fat, gaining not only a rich flavor but a wonderful gratin.

continued on next page
Our meal included two additional *gratins provençales*, both made with recipes from transplanted Americans:

- **Tian de courge** (gratin of Winter squash) [Margaret Carney and Bill Walker] is scrumptious with its diced orange squash, breadcrumbs, parsley, thyme, and garlic. *Tian* refers to a type of red earthenware dish that is ideal for long, slow baking, traditionally in the communal oven. Margaret adapted a recipe from Richard Olney (1974), one of several American writers who sojourned in Paris in the years after World War 2 and helped popularize French cuisine in the U.S.; others include A. J. Liebling, Alice B. Toklas, M.F.K. Fisher, Julia Child, and Alexis Lichine. Olney moved to Paris in 1951 from his native Iowa after falling in love with French food, eventually settled in Provence, and in 1970 published the first of his many books, *The French Menu Cookbook: The Food and Wine of France—Season by Delicious Season*.

- **Tomates rôties** (roast tomatoes) [Susan Davis] is another dish from Wells’s book (2004). The tomatoes are first cut in half, seared in a stove pot, deglazed with red wine vinegar, and sprinkled with sea salt, herbs, and Parmesan cheese before being oven-roasted for 30 minutes. It’s a distinctively Provencal custom to roast tomatoes in the oven instead of cooking them in a saucepan on the stove. Wells, a widely respected food writer originally from Milwaukee, and formerly the Paris-based food critic for the *International Herald Tribune*, established a cooking school named Clos Chanteduc after she and her husband purchased a hilltop vineyard in the Rhône valley in Provence in 1984.

Many of the vegetables that we think of as characteristic of southern France were actually brought from the east (such as eggplant) or from the Americas (such as green beans, squash, and potatoes). A geographic mixture of that sort is frequently of all, in the form of vinegar-pickled peppers (ibid., pp. 292-293).

A delightful *tarte au citron* (lemon tart) [Pam Dishman] was adapted from an Anne Willan (1981) recipe. Pam prepared her favorite pastry crust, then made the filling with beaten eggs, ground blanched almonds, the juice and grated rind of one lemon, lots of melted butter, and a moderate amount of sugar. The lemon, whose cultivation was brought by Arabs in medieval times, is probably the most important fruit in modern French cooking, used to make sauces and marinades for meat and fish, to flavor cakes and other desserts like this one, and to fix the color of other fruits and vegetables. The most renowned lemon of France is the *citron de Menton*, grown in the Côte d’Azur.

The phrase *melon à la Saint-Jacques* (scalloped cantaloupe) [Barbara and Phil Zaret] is a play on the French term *coquille Saint-Jacques* (“scallops”). Since the melon pulp is scooped out with a spoon or melon-baller, it is shaped, as we would say, “in scallops” (in French, *en coquilles*, “in shells”). Using a recipe from the Escudier/Fuller cookbook (1968), Barb sprinkled the melon with a sweet red wine. She substituted Athena-type muskmelon for the hard-to-find Cavaillon, which is highly esteemed for its distinctive fragrance and taste. The cantaloupe first arrived in Provence from Italy around 1400, and the variety named after Cavaillon became famous in the 1700s (CNAC *Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur*, pp. 226-229). In the Provençal commune of Cavaillon today there is an annual Melon Fair or Festival, usually held on the Friday and Saturday before Bastille Day. The *callisson* is a famous melon-flavored candy of Aix-en-Provence, similar to marzipan. It is made in an almond shape from a paste of ground almonds and candied melon and orange, and is topped with *glace royale* (royal icing). It arose in this region in the 1500s when almonds were first introduced, but it had some ancestors in medieval Italy.

**Sunny and Salty Riches of the Côte d’Azur**

Redolent of Summers on the Mediterranean, the *salade niçoise* is probably the most famous of the French repertoire of *salades composés* (combination salads). Instead of being tossed together in a big bowl, the items of such a salad are dressed and seasoned separately, then arranged attractively on a serving platter. We had two versions, one from Jan and Dan Longone and the other from Marion Holt. Both followed recipes calling for a myriad of ingredients, about two dozen in all, such as chunks of cooked tuna, anchovy fillets, tomatoes, boiled potatoes and green beans, hard-boiled eggs, lettuce, black *niçoise* olives, onion, and *vinaigrette*. Here we have another example of modernization in French cuisine. The original version of this salad, many centuries old, used salted anchovy filets but not the more expensive tuna, which coastal people referred to as *le steak de la mer* (“the steak of the sea”). Ingredients such as vinegar and potato are also modern additions, and much appreciated nowadays.

*Ratatouille* [Judy Steeh] is a well-known side-dish of sautéed Summer vegetables (typically eggplant, tomato, bell pepper, and zucchini) with garlic and other herbs and seasonings. It can be eaten either hot or cold, and is often
Len Sander’s *pissaladière* is a Niçoise onion tart baked with black olives, anchovies, olive oil, and herbs.

served with lamb or other meats. In the Elizabeth David (1955) recipe that Judy followed, the chopped vegetables are sautéed in olive oil along with much of their juices, resulting in a sort of wet *ragoût* that is very popular these days. *Dans le temps* (in the old days), it was also common to place this *ragoût* in an open casserole dish and give it the *gratin* treatment in a hot oven.

The Côte d’Azur has a nickname, the Riviera (Italian for “coastline”), reflecting that this land has frequently been ruled by Italians. In fact, the city of Nice wasn’t finally incorporated into France until 1860. The Italians have left a huge and welcome footprint on the culinary landscape here. A wildly popular specialty in Nice today that has Italian antecedents is the *socca*. This is a large, round, unleavened flatbread made from a batter of chickpea flour, water, olive oil, and salt; its origins seem to go back to medieval times. Today it is served at shops similar to pizza joints, where a baker will pull one out of the oven, turn it from the copper pan onto a cutting board, season it with pepper, and slice it up; the customers pick up the hot slices with their fingers and eat them much as we might eat a slice of pizza.

Another regional specialty with Italian forebears is a baked onion pie called *pissaladière* [Len and Mae Sander]. This is a flat, open tart of bread dough akin to the *fougasse*, and topped with a *compote* consisting of sliced caramelized onions, black olives, and *pissalat*. *Pissalat*, a word derived from an ancient term for “salted fish”, is a pungent condiment of anchovies (in former times, small-fry sardines) preserved with salt, olive oil, and herbs; it is used in the regional cuisine in many different ways. Len used a recipe from Mireille Johnston (1976).

Thus, our July 14 *tour de France*— just as far-flung as the famous bicycle race— ran from sea to sea, from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean. While this Bastille Day celebration lacked the glitz and glamour of a victors’ platform or a military parade, it had an *éclat*, a brilliance of its own— shining a light on what French people have devised for their dining tables based on centuries of toil, enterprise, and creativity by women and men from all walks of life.

References


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Eating Their Way Across Siberia and the Russian Far East

Sharon Hudgins, with recipes by Sharon Hudgins and Tom Hudgins,
T-Bone Whacks and Caviar Snacks: Cooking with Two Texans in Siberia and the Russian Far East
Denton, TX: Univ. of North Texas Press, 2018
448 pp., $39.95 hbk.

by Eric Duskin

Repast subscriber Eric Duskin is Professor Emeritus of History at Christopher Newport University (Newport News, VA), and currently lives in Washington, DC. He has a Ph.D. in History from the Univ. of Michigan and has lived and worked in Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. Our Fall 2014 issue included Eric’s article about the Soviet Union’s first mass-produced cookbook, and in Fall 2017 he reviewed Vladimir Alexandrov’s book, The Black Russian, about the early-20th-Century restaurateur, Frederick Bruce Thomas.

Sharon Hudgins, the author of T-Bone Whacks and Caviar Snacks, describes the book as a culinary memoir of her and her husband’s cooking, eating, and shopping adventures in Siberia and the Russian Far East. Sharon and her husband, Tom, who are both university professors, lived in Asian portions of Russia for extended periods in the 1990s and returned several times in more recent years when hired to work on National Geographic Expeditions Trans-Siberian Railroad tours. T-Bone Whacks and Caviar Snacks is both a cookbook and a travelogue. The book contains 140 recipes that are paired with entertaining stories about preparing the dishes in the frequently challenging conditions experienced in Siberia and the Russian Far East.

For Russia the decade of the 1990s was a difficult period. The economy struggled to transition from the Soviet system to a market economy. Sharon Hudgins’s accounts of searching for ingredients, and cooking in dilapidated Soviet-era kitchens, during her stays in 1990s Russia bring the period alive. If there was ever a time and place when people needed comfort foods, this was it. Fortunately, Sharon and Tom learned from locals how to prepare many classic dishes that have helped Russians to find some joy and warmth in their long, cold Winters and their frequently troubled history.

The book includes recipes for hearty fare, such as Spicy Beef Borshch, Pel’meni (Siberian stuffed dumplings), Stuffed Cabbage, and Russian Fish Stew, so readers can prepare and enjoy some wonderfully tasty foods. These dishes will fill your belly and bring a smile to your face even if you aren’t experiencing the cold of Siberia. The recipes are easy to follow and can be prepared with items available in the United States.

I used the book’s recipes to prepare two delicious side dishes. A great variation on standard American potato salad is the Vladivostok Potato Salad, which includes equal amounts of sour cream and mayo, a lot of garlic, and a crab meat and mayonnaise mixture that is placed on top of each serving. When I prepared this potato salad, I did not add the suggested salmon caviar garnish, but I will do so when I make it for guests. Salmon caviar would certainly elevate this already flavorful dish to new heights of tastiness and add a vibrant red accent to the presentation.

I also prepared the Korean Carrot Salad. This colorful, slightly spicy side dish represents some of the Korean influence that is common not only in the Russian Far East but also, I have personally observed, in former Soviet Central Asia where Stalin forced Koreans to relocate during the Second World War.

I am anxious to soon try the book’s recipes for Russian Easter Paskha (a sweet cheese dessert) and the Russian Cold Summer Soup which is made with beef, vegetables, and kvas, a beverage fermented from Russian dark bread. Kvas can be found in Russian grocery stores in the U.S., and Sharon advises that if you live in an area where kvas isn’t available a semi-sweet sparkling cider can be used instead.

Most of the book recounts Sharon’s and Tom’s adventures learning about the cuisines of Siberia and the Russian Far East from friends and neighbors who were eager to share their food and recipes and to help the couple find scarce goods in early post-Soviet markets. But Sharon and Tom also describe times when they attempted to share some of their own favorite foods with their friends in the region. In my own travels I have come to understand the unique comfort that one can find in foods from home. For Sharon and Tom, who hail from Texas, the craving for Tex-Mex food became intense. They write about their effort to prepare a Tex-Mex feast for their Russian friends in Vladivostok. They made salsas, spicy beans, and turkey mole enchiladas (the recipes are included in the book) and served tortillas that they’d brought from home. The meal did not go well. Sharon writes that their guests mostly just pushed the food around on their plates with distraught looks on their faces. I laughed as I read this account because I had done something similar when living in Moscow in the early 1990s. A friend and I had found ingredients for tacos in a diplomatic store, and we were excited to make a taco dinner for our friends. While our guests did eat the tacos, they clearly did not share our enthusi-
Siberian Pine Nut Meringues

Sharon Hudgins writes: This is one of my favorite recipes from the Siberian cookbook—and it won a prize in a 2017 Dallas baking contest, the first time I'd ever entered a cooking contest!

Meringue cookies are a good way to use up leftover egg whites. A friend told me about an excellent cook in Vladivostok who beat her egg whites for meringues using only a plate and a fork—but you can use an electric mixer instead. Toasted pine nuts give these seductive cookies a distinctive Siberian flavor.

► Note: It’s best to make these on a dry (not humid) day.

- ½ cup toasted pine nuts, coarsely chopped
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons cornstarch
- 4 large egg whites, at room temperature
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ¼ teaspoon salt

- Toast the pine nuts in advance for 8-10 minutes in a preheated 325° F. oven. Cool before chopping.
- Preheat the oven to 225° F. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper. (You’ll need two baking sheets that can both sit side by side on the middle rack of the oven.)
- Whisk the sugar and cornstarch together in a small bowl.
- With an electric mixer on high speed, beat the egg whites, vanilla, and salt together in a large bowl until soft peaks form. Decrease the mixer speed to medium, and very slowly add the sugar, beating constantly. Scrape down the sides occasionally with a rubber spatula. Then increase the mixer speed to high and beat until the egg whites are glossy and stiff peaks form. Fold in the chopped pine nuts.
- Drop the mixture by well-rounded teaspoonfuls onto the baking sheets, placing them about ½ inch apart.
- Bake at preheated 225° F. for 1 hour, then turn off the oven and leave the meringues inside for 2 more hours. Be patient: Do not open the oven door! Store the meringues in a tightly covered container. (They taste even better a day or two after you make them.)
- Makes 48 irresistible, crunchy cookies.

The book’s final chapter covers Sharon’s and Tom’s recent travels on the Trans-Siberian Railroad. They share several recipes for the high-quality dishes that are now served on the luxury tourist train, and they provide updates on the towns and cities they had visited in the 1990s. These updates give their culinary memoir something of a happy ending. Sharon and Tom found that the dingy and poorly-stocked stores and markets that they’d known in the 1990s are now mostly bright, colorful emporiums with an abundance of meats, vegetables, and spices. They also found that local enthusiasm for traditional foods and recipes remains strong. After reading T-Bone Whacks and Caviar Snacks, I became eager to eat my way across Siberia and the Russian Far East.

Editor’s note: Of related interest is an article by Sharon Hudgins, “Sourcing and Saving Food in Siberian Kitchens”, in Gastronomica (Fall 2019).

CUISINES OF FRANCE continued from page 13


“MY FACE IS AMERICAN, BUT MY STOMACH IS THAI”:
STEPS IN NORTHERN THAILAND

by Rheta Rubenstein

What follows are edited excerpts from a travelogue that Rheta Rubenstein kept while she and her husband Howard were in Chiang Mai, northern Thailand, in Dec. 2018 and Jan. 2019. The couple have traveled and lived in that region intermittently for 30 years, and have owned an apartment in Chiang Mai for the past decade. Rheta and Howard are both native Detroiter, and they lived in Livonia, MI, for many decades until they retired as a mathematics professor and union electrician, respectively. When not overseas, they live in Clark County, WA, about 10 miles north of Portland, OR.

When I tell people that I winter in Thailand, they remark how they wish they could go, or— if they have traveled here— could return. I wonder, what is the image that they hold at that moment? What view, taste, or sensation is it that they feel or dream of? To me, the essence of Thailand, what makes it so appealing, is the friendliness of the people, great scenery, a deep sense of Buddhist peace, and incredible food— particularly in the north.

I recall the original conversation that drew us to Thailand in 1988. This was in the first decade of “frequent flyer miles”. The programs back then were more generous than today. We had saved and earned enough miles on United Airlines to go, at Christmas time, to Asia and have a stop-over. Howard wanted to return to Hong Kong and Guangzhou, China, where we had toured in 1986. He had figured that we needed to find a stop-over that would represent a big savings over ordinary paid travel.

We were debating between Singapore and Bangkok, so we phoned a friend of ours in Columbus, Ohio, who is a world traveler. He loved being asked. “If you go to Singapore,” he phoned, “you will find everything spotless. Trains run on time. Things are modern and attractive. If you go to Bangkok, you will find the air is dirty, you can’t drink the water, the traffic is horrendous, the place is noisy and congested. Go to Bangkok. You’ll love it!” And so we did… and have been returning to Thailand ever since.

Cooking in Our Chiang Mai Condo

In Chiang Mai, in northern Thailand, we live in a studio apartment that we purchased in a condominium village of around 800 units. It’s not situated in the touristy areas within the moat of the old walled city, nor in the trendy areas where foreigners typically live, but instead in a working-class Thai neighborhood.

At about 400 square feet, our apartment would be considered a huge studio in New York City, and even here it is quite ample. It’s an end unit, so we have four windows. Our living/dining area is a couch and upholstered chair with a glass-topped coffee table.

After we bought the place in 2008, Howard, with some hired help, installed a kitchen in the 5- by 7-foot alcove outside the bathroom, including a handsome granite counter about 5 feet long, which is large for a studio apartment. Our cooker is a portable induction device with one “burner” and electronic controls; when not in use, it sits on one of the low shelving units below the counter. Most of the time the sink and the dish-drainer take up half the space, and the toaster and various water bottles take up most of the rest. But when we actually cook we need to “clear the decks”, so the drainer gets shunted to the floor or (not my choice) the bed. Still, the variety and high quality of food that Howard creates with such limited space is quite remarkable. My thinking is that, were he not well-trained in better space, this would not be possible. As an aside, it doesn’t hurt that we can always go to the street stalls outside our condo for forgotten garlic, shallots, gai lan (Chinese broccoli), or even prepared foods to supplement any meal. Of the latter, aeps are my favorite— packets of chopped meats and spices wrapped and grilled in a banana leaf.

Visiting Our Local “Hot Spots” in Chiang Mai

Upon my arrival in Chiang Mai on Friday, Dec. 7, Howard offered several options for going out to lunch. I chose the spot where we order kaoy soi (also transliterated as khao soi or kao saoy)— a northern Thai/Burmese soup dish with two types of egg noodles— fresh and crisp-fried. It has meat, lots of herbs, and a curry-like sauce with a bit of coconut milk. The order comes with a small plate of pickled vegetables and, of course, lime. After my long flights, this meal met my need for fluid and nourishment in a most delightful way.

From there we went to the nearby Wat Faham. This is a less spectacular wat (Buddhist temple) than others, but has lovely gardens, both potted and in-ground, and it lies on the Ping River.

So we enjoyed the flowers and ambled to the river, where one appeared to be special among Buddhists in Thailand for ‘making merit’. They buy designated fish, turtles, frogs, birds, or other small animals, say certain prayers, and release the animals. So we observed several visitors, from toddlers to grand-parents, making merit. Plasticized sheets imprinted with all of the prayers were available for the observant.

After I unpacked and took a nap, we went for dinner to a local Arroy Khaotom, Nung Baht (“Tasty Rice Soup, One Baht”) restaurant, which is sort of Thai-Chinese. (This is one of the places that we can walk to. One bowl of soupy rice is 1 baht, the local unit of currency that is equivalent to about 3 cents. I prefer the drier khao suay (“beautiful rice”) like we eat at home, which typically costs 10 baht here. Another dish was dom mara, stuffed boiled bitter melon. We make Chinese-style stuffed bitter melon at home, steamed (not boiled) with black bean sauce and garlic. Here it is mild, in thin soup, with coriander garnish. We
should have ordered just one, because they turned out to be humungous. We also had pbla muuk phat cha, stir-fried squid. My favorite dish was phet palaw, duck stewed with five-spice. Our vegetable was chayote, but the greens, not the more familiar fruit. It was all delicious, and it was fun being in the Thai family atmosphere where curious young children amble and play in the aisles and everyone relaxes together.

Saturday was a day to continue making the rounds of our local food shops. In the morning I awoke with one request: a breakfast of jok from our local vendor. Howard claims that he could have predicted this months ago!

Around 9:30 or 10:00 a.m. she would dis-assemble the entire outfit to truck all of it home except for the cart. Last year she moved to an enclosed shop, close to her old corner of the sidewalk. So, there is room for more customers, with seating indoors and a place to leave things overnight. However, she has lost the option of selling to drivers.

Later, we had lunch in our condo village area. The noodle lady there also makes just a few dishes, but consistently excellent. She knows exactly what I want, and despite my having learned to say the dish last year, I needed coaching again this year. Guaythiew nua puay sen yaay is noodle soup with stewed beef on wide fresh rice noodles. When I repeated the name again with support later that night at our dinner restaurant, I could hear that our Thai friend sounds a lot different than me when he speaks. It’s not just the consonants and vowels, there’s the flow, tones, and nuance. Nevertheless, at lunch the vendor waited patiently while I struggled to work out how to say her dish.

In the afternoon I continued to rest, read, and write. Howard went to the gym for his daily workout.

For dinner we went to Laab PaTan, the first word being the name of a standard dish here and the second word being the name of the neighborhood in which the place is situated. This is Howard’s latest favorite as a nearby restaurant. The couple Ay and Dao and their teenaged daughter Music (all nicknames) are very friendly and sweet. The same is true of Ay’s parents, who are the owners and cook. And the staff, too, greets us warmly. We had laab moo khua, a version of the famous northern Thai

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dish of chopped meat with many herbs. We also had gaeng maprao gai, curry soup with young coconut and chicken, and dom sap moo, a sour soup with meat. As always we had fresh vegetables to go with the meal. You help yourself from bowls at the front. I like the cabbage because it makes a nice container for the laab and it cuts the spiciness. I also enjoyed the dill because I love it regardless.

In our condo, Howard will sometimes prepare laab, too, presented with a circle of cucumbers around the edge. One friend tells me that laab is one of her favorite dishes. “But I only eat it when it is made of pork”, she says. “It has a lot of spices, and they often use both pig flesh and blood. It is usually served with a big basket of raw herbs; some of the herbs have an anti-cancer property.”

You can see that in just a few meals, we had visited many of our local ‘hot’ spots for food in Chiang Mai. As I have often said, here in Thailand we really don’t need to do much— just relax and hang out between meals, which are always amazing.

How to Temper the Spicy Heat

Recently, I was talking to an acquaintance about eating in Thailand. He was saying that the food of Issan (Northeastern Thailand) is particularly spicy. I commented that it is to be eaten with rice (preferably sticky rice) and raw vegetables (phak sot), both of which temper the heat. These are typically leafy greens that are served free of charge with meals, or at least with particularly hot dishes. You get a large bowl and choose your own combination, similar to a “salad bar” in the U.S.

However, when we first started staying in Northern Thailand in the mid-1990s, we avoided these fresh veggie offerings because we assumed that they were rinsed in tap water and were therefore risky. We were very careful to drink and use only bottled water. In fact, I recall once inadvertently rinsing my mouth with tap water when brushing my teeth, and worrying for a day or so about the consequences. Fresh, clean water is one of the many things that we take for granted in our “developed”, privileged world.

Nowadays, however, Chiang Mai has better water and we eat the offerings of raw veggies everywhere. Still, they are often not served to foreign customers. Why? It is most likely that restaurant staff have found that when they offer them, the visitors usually don’t touch them. Perhaps this is due to the foreigners’ lack of familiarity with the Asian vegetables (such as local mint or young tamarind leaves), or perhaps because they still think the water is unsafe. Such a loss! It is precisely these delicious greens that are supposed to be so healthy for us all.

A Chinese Village in the Far North

Some people get confused by the fact that New York refers to both a city and a state. In Thailand this type of pairing is rampant: provinces and their capital city routinely share the same name. For example, our condo is in the city of Chiang Mai, which is in the province of Chiang Mai. And our current destination is the town of Mae Hong Son, which is in the province of— guess what?— Mae Hong Son.

En route, we are planning to visit Pai, a town in Mae Hong Son province that we explored first in 1994 or 1995, nearly 25 years ago. In the 1990s, Pai (pronounced more like “bye”) was very, very quiet and had a free hot-spring. Now the town has morning market, afternoon market, and evening markets, dozens and dozens of guest houses and resorts, and food everywhere. It is crawling with walking tourists who are not too agilely sharing the road with cyclists, inexperienced motorcyclists, and cars. We discovered all of this by accident when we tried to go to dinner in town our first night. Once we realized how quickly the light was fading and how difficult driving was, we high-tailed ourselves back to our own quiet neighborhood for a simple meal.

Our drive from Chiang Mai to Pai on Thursday, Dec. 13 took 5½ hours, including a stop for lunch. Unfortunately, we could not fully appreciate the magnificent mountain scenery, dense forests, hairpin uphill curves, and wide vistas because, for nearly the entire afternoon, it rained.

Per his usual, Howard found us a place to stay that is far from the crowds. We had to navigate a very muddy road in order to enter the compound; the car will need a major bath, underbody and all, to recover! On the positive side, we were put in a fine bungalow with running water, plants in the room, microwave oven, toaster, coffee maker, sink, and large bathroom. Outside is a garden dining area, a living room with a swing, tiny butterflies, singing birds, chirping crickets, bright red flowering bougainvillea, and only occasional motorcycle noise in the distance… the epitome of Thai relaxation!

The next day, we made an outing to a nearby village, Santichon, which is one of dozens in this region that were first settled after World War 2 by expatriate soldiers from Yunnan province in southwestern China. (These settlers were holdouts loyal to the Kuomintang, or KMT— the Chinese Nationalists, headed by Chiang Kai-shek—after the KMT was defeated by Mao’s Communists in 1949.) Many of their descendants are now tea farmers here.

We checked out a few restaurants in the village and chose the one with the best views. We saw that the menu had fried shiitake mushrooms, a specialty of Santichon, but when Howard read the Thai he saw that these were deep fried, not baked as we preferred. He was able to get the staff to prepare them as he likes, so we settled in. The other typical Yunnanese dish that we had were mantou, which are basically soft, white, steamed buns, a staple of northern China that had spread, in various forms, across Asia along the Silk Roads. The third dish was entirely new to us: long, slender threads, served with a light and lovely sauce and tiny bits of roasted rice and meat. It has no Thai name— we learned later that it is a root vegetable. Afterwards, we had the waitress show us pictures of the raw vegetable, which looks like an elongated white ginger root.

Given that the hot springs now cost 400 baht (about $12) admission per person, we instead visited the free waterfall. The day being dry, we were better able to enjoy the mountain scenery. At the waterfall we found an international crew of 20-somethings romping in the water, some of them even sliding down the steep rock over which the water falls.
Lao and Khan Influences

On Saturday we drove from Pai to Mae Hong Son. This is an extremely popular motorcycle route, with seemingly hundreds of turns in the road. Howard was definitely busy turning, turning, turning, often on steep hairpin curves. It would have been more fun on a motorbike, but it was quite wonderful in the car. So many shades and shapes of green! Many long stretches of road had no services, nary a coffee shop, let alone auto fuel and, beautifully, no billboards. Just miles and miles of dense, deeply vined forest with more types of trees than one can imagine.

En route we stopped at Pang Mapha. We were strolling along the street and Howard started reading the large menu aloud to me in Thai. We could see that the lady owner was very impressed. Of course, we had to eat there. We enjoyed this friendly, delicious, extremely clean raan aa-haan (food shop). The man was deeply complimented when Howard remarked how spotless the shop was.

We also stopped at a pass with a magnificent viewpoint. Of course there were lots of vendors and young girls wearing native hill-tribe attire (‘Take picture with you, 10 baht’). Mostly they played on the four-seat Ferris wheel, here free and open to anyone. We had a nice chat with a young couple from the French Alps.

In the afternoon we wandered the streets of Mae Hong Son, which were very, very quiet. I figured that, given the heat, everyone was lying low, doing a Thai-style siesta. Howard found a raan aa-haan where he is sure that he had lunched on previous trips, but it was closed late afternoons so we’d need to wait a day. We decided to take it easy, too, until dinner. So later we explored the night market and even purchased some souvenirs. Howard dickers well. But it was sad to see so many vendors, with so many wares, carefully setting up and arranging their items, only later to repack, with few shoppers having come by— it is so uncrowded compared to Pai and Chiang Mai.

That evening we again toured the ‘walking street’ but soon decided it was better to eat than browse… after all, food might run out. Howard, in his inimitable way, was able to quickly find the food ‘hot spot’ where people thronged for grilled meats, on-the-spot salads, and gai yang. We have proclaimed wide and near that we enjoy eating on the street, which many visitors in Thailand carefully avoid. We have always argued that you can inspect the entire kitchen on the street and see the full preparation of the food, not to mention how fresh and tasty it is.

Here, we ate literally on the street. Behind the cooks were small, low tables where diners could sit beside the lake and enjoy their moments-from-the-grill food. We had gai yang and other goodies from one vendor and som tom (green papaya salad) from his nearby ‘co-conspirator’— these two dishes are classic together. The raw papaya is shredded and mixed with lime juice, tomato, dried shrimp, chillies and other spices. Later, when we went to a bar on the same strip for an after-dinner beer, we discovered that we could have carried out our food to the bar and enjoyed the beer with dinner, not to mention real tables and chairs! So it goes.

Sunday morning in the town of Mae Hong Son, we scoured the local dalaat (market) searching for jok. We found, instead, majestic vegetables (e.g., bitter melons a foot and a half long and as wide as your fist), snacks, and clothing. On the street nearby we enjoyed the local jok, which was good, but not nearly as special as what we get outside our condo back in Chiang Mai. We are so spoiled!

After breakfast we took ourselves out for coffee (hot, instead of the iced version that we usually get in afternoons). The tables were covered with delicate, uniformly made hand-crocheted tablecloths. On the window facing east, the slats were encircled by vine-like plants that made a lovely green sunscreen.

Later that morning we drove the car up, up, up to Wat Prathet Doi Kong Mu, a Burmese-style Buddhist temple. There is a great white chedi in Burmese style (see photo); smaller chedis; bells and the other Buddhist accoutrements; the de rigueur stalls selling wares; and a wonderful view of the city below, including the lake (see photo below). Howard offered to photograph one group of travelers coming from Chiang Mai. We had a lovely conversation with one of the women— mostly

continued on next page
Examples of herb-flavored dishes of the Shan (Tai Yai) ethnic group, which we ate at a raan aa-haan (food shop) in the town of Mae Hong Son in northwestern Thailand.

NORTHERN THAILAND continued from page 19

in Thai, along with some English. I gave her a souvenir postcard from the Portland Japanese Garden.

At lunch, we met a young woman from Chiang Mai who had studied at Chiang Mai University and worked in ecology and alternative fuels, but since her father’s recent death, she now manages his insurance business. This lunch was at the raan aa-haan that Howard had dearly anticipated the previous day, and it did not disappoint (see photos above). The food was distinctly Shan or Tai Yai— not spicy but filled with delicious herb flavors. What a treat to dine with company in this shady, spotless, outstanding food shop. We liked it so much that we returned the next morning for breakfast before another, even more twisty, drive to Mae Chaem, the beginning of our return trip home.

Tropical Fruits from the Garden

After spending a week back home at our condo, on Monday, Dec. 24 we visited our friend Wud (pronounced like “wood”), who lives near the village of Hang Dong in Chiang Mai province.

Wud grew up in the village and, from a young age, was interested in raising specialty birds. He is also a fabulous gardener. His husband is Laurent, a Frenchman, who is able to come visit about a month at a time a few times a year. Several years ago, Laurent built a nice apartment for Wud and his dad on the family’s land. Wud often cooked for us and others there. He really knows northern food and can cook it very well. And he has many, many coops for various species of birds that he raises and sells as pets.

About four years ago, developers near the village started a mubaan, a modern village with spacious homes. Laurent and Wud had one built. So Wud now lives a few miles from his Dad and has a huge garden and swimming pool, and room for even more birds. On our visit to the big house, the first thing that we did was to see the garden and birds. It is quite something that in just three years, the garden is well established. But, of course, this is Thailand where things grow! He has different types of banana, jackfruit, mangos, papaya, pineapple, and also coffee beans, as well as many bushes and flowers. One small cockatiel, Susie, is a pet who comes (slowly) when Wud calls her; he pets her like we might pet a cat or dog. As with others whom we know here, Wud has an aura of peace and joy. His deep appreciation for life shines through in his plants and pets, concern for the environment, and care for other people. I hope you can sense some of his love as you read these words.

We took ourselves to a local raan aa-haan for lunch (see photo below). We had two kinds of laab, as well as dom yom gop (frog soup), aep moo (chopped meat with many herbs cooked in a banana leaf), another banana-leaf goodie, and, it goes without saying, phak sot (fresh vegetables). For dessert we had som-o (pomelo) already cleaned and ready to eat.
Both Wud and Howard spoke in Thai with the owner. Howard figures that if he speaks Thai and asks detailed questions about the food, Thai people will understand that he is in earnest when he asks for authentically prepared fare. He often tries to be even more proactive by saying emphatically, in Thai: “My face is American, but my stomach is Thai.” We enjoyed our meal; still, at the end, the shop lady confessed that next time she would put more prik (chillies) into the dish as Howard had requested. Until they see him eat, he is clearly a farang (foreigner), and no amount of charm or language fluency can defeat such cultural assumptions.

On Christmas Day— which is just another weekday here, as it would be for us at home— we went with our friend Thannarong for lunch at Laab PaTan, our favorite local restaurant. Thannarong, or Than for short, is one of the younger brothers of Chum Chooey, who was the guesthouse owner who first introduced us to northern Thailand in 1994. She taught us how to use the transportation (red mini-vans) in Chiang Mai, the names of fruits and vegetables, where to buy what and how to bargain for it, what to see and, most important, where and what to eat. Howard, a foodie himself, believes that she knew more about food than any other person he knows. On mornings at her guesthouse we would order jok (rice porridge), and in addition to that warm, filling, and delicious breakfast, she would send out from her kitchen other foods ‘just for tasting, not for eating.’ Our table became an array of small plates, each one not only new and delicious, but an opportunity for Howard to grow his knowledge of northern Thai cuisine in conversation with Chum Chooey. Unfortunately, she died in the late 1990s.

We enjoy getting together with Chum’s brother Than. Often he likes to eat at a particular Vietnamese restaurant which we also enjoy. Not that we’ve eaten pho there, but there are lots of other Thai-Vietnamese choices that we can share. Today we went instead to Laab PaTan where we enjoyed the huge platter of free fresh vegetables along with northern cuisine. The pictures are from other places but they show examples of aep, one of the dishes that, to me, epitomizes northern Thai food. It is not very spicy but it is a lovely mix of chopped meat, sometimes egg, and lots of herbs. It is grilled or roasted in a banana leaf. If you wanted, you could eat it right from its wrapper as walk-away food. At the table we eat it with sticky rice.

We have not been to Than’s home, but he must have a substantial garden: whenever we get together he brings huge piles of produce. Like a ‘hand’ of 30 bananas. And some kind of tree pod, actually three of them, each nearly half a meter long. This time, among other items he brought rosella, a species of hibiscus. We cleaned and cooked the red blossoms to make a sweet drink. We used less sugar than called for and enjoyed this refreshment. There were tons more waste than blossoms, but so it goes. Despite some serious online research, the other items that Than brought were so enigmatic that we did not know what to do with them!

Two Favorite Restaurants Outside Chiang Mai

My being in conversation classes for five days a week puts a damper on our outings. Surely we cannot travel broadly. But being in a bowl of mountains there is always lots to see, and not too far away.

On Dec. 27 Howard and I rode by motorbike up, up, up into the mountains for a return visit to the famous Samoeng circuit, which is full of great vistas and crisp air. This time we did not actually make the full circuit, nor did we visit Samoeng, but we did drive by Mae Rim and into the Mae Sa Valley. We also skipped the many, many tourist traps— snake farm, butterfly garden, insect museum, off-road-vehicle rentals, and more.

En route we stopped at a favorite restaurant, Dong Sompong Kitchen, which I have nicknamed “the garden stream place” due to its distinguishing characteristics. The place epitomizes the indoor-outdoor atmosphere that I treasure in so many restaurants. The stream runs right beside the long dining room (it is to Howard’s left in the photo on the next page). We tried not to overdo it, given that this was lunch and we were going to walk a lot during the day. Our first dish was fried frog with garlic (gop taut gratiem). In addition to chopped garlic all over the meat, there are full cloves also fried and integrated with the

Examples of aep, a characteristic northern-Thai dish of chopped meat and herbs, grilled or roasted in a banana leaf.
As in all areas around here, there are many wats, and on this trip in January we visited the largest one, Wat Haripunchai. A prized 1000-year old place with a lovely golden gate, it is the centerpiece of Lamphun.

Lamphun is also graced with an outstanding Northern Thai restaurant, Dao Kanong. Dao (“star”) is the same name as our local Laab PaTan lady restauranteur, and both are definitely stars in our book. We can virtually smell our way to the restaurant, since some of the food is in large pots at the front. It is such fun to peek inside to see and smell our choices! We have been here with many friends and always find it delicious. We need more people so we can maximize the flavors! The staff is very warm and we feel graciously welcomed. One woman in particular always gives Howard a big smile, even remembering details about what he likes. But that’s not too difficult: after all, how many farang (foreigners) are there who have such a deep appreciation for this food and who speak Thai?

Editor’s Notes

1. Five-spice powder is a spice blend that is common in Chinese and Chinese-influenced cuisine. Typical ingredients are star anise, cassia (Chinese cinnamon), Sichuan pepper, cloves, and ground fennel seeds.
2. In much of China the name for this dish is pronounced more like “juke”, and in much of South Asia, where the dish might have originated, it is called kanji (congee).
3. Gai yang, often called “Thai barbecued chicken” in English, is of Laotian origin, very popular in Isaan, Northeast Thailand, and a common street food. Before being grilled over low heat, the chicken is marinated with ingredients such as garlic, turmeric, coriander root, lemongrass, and white pepper.
4. Chedi is a pagoda-like Buddhist shrine housing sacred remains or relics, used for devotional prayer and meditation. The term chedi is used mainly in Thailand; Buddhists elsewhere use the term stūpa.
5. This town of Mae Hong Son lies only about 10 miles from the Burmese border. The Shan, or Tai Yai, is a cultural and ethnic group centered in the nearby Shan State of northeastern Burma, and also found in pockets elsewhere in Burma, Thailand, Laos, China, and India. Their language is related to Thai.
CHAA member Patti Smith has been collaborating with Keegan Rodgers, owner of the Lakehouse Bakery (Chelsea, MI), to organize “Desserts by the Decade”, a fun, free, monthly series of history/baking classes at the Ann Arbor District Library and the Chelsea District Library. The series began with the decade of the 1920s in August, the 1930s in September, and so on. At each class, Keegan demonstrates a recipe or two (with food samples provided) while Patti presents stories about local and national history.

“Foodways of the Midwest” is a roundtable discussion, free and open to all, scheduled on Sat., Mar. 7, 2020 at the Newberry Library in Chicago. These days, “Midwestern cuisine” is likely to evoke brats, gelatin-based salads, hot-dish casseroles, and perhaps a few regional specialties like deep-dish pizza or deep-fried cheese curds. But the region’s culinary history is far more complex than these stereotypes suggest. This symposium will explore the complex histories that have shaped the real and quite varied cuisines of the Midwest. Reserve your free ticket starting on Feb. 3 at https://www.newberry.org/03072020-foodways-midwest.

Anna Zeide won the 2019 James Beard Foundation Award in the category Reference, History, and Scholarship for her book Canned: The Rise and Fall of Consumer Confidence in the American Food Industry (Univ. of California Press, 2018). Now an Asst. Prof. of History at Oklahoma State Univ., Dr. Zeide had an article in California Press, 2018). Now an Asst. Prof. of History at for her book Confidence in the American Food Industry”.

Current or forthcoming exhibits:
• “Savour: Food Culture in the Age of Enlightenment” runs in Toronto from Oct. 17, 2019 to Jan. 19, 2020, followed by Hartford, CT (see sidebar on page 7).
• “Semi[te] Sweet: On Jews and Chocolate” is a traveling exhibit based on a book by Rabbi Deborah Prinz (a Culinary Historians of New York member), On the Chocolate Trail: A Delicious Adventure Connecting Jews, Religions, History, Travel, Rituals and Recipes to the Magic of Cacao (2013, 2017). The exhibit was created at the Bernard Museum of Temple Emanu-El (Upper East Side of Manhattan), and is currently booked for the Mayerson Jewish Community Center of Cincinnati and for the Lawrence Family JCC of East Side of Manhattan), and is currently booked.
• “Defining Cups and Saucers” is the new pop-up exhibit from the International Museum of Dinnerware Design, curated by IMoDD Director and CHAA member Dr. Margaret Carney. The exhibit, running Jan. 13 – Feb. 8, 2020 in the Munro Gallery at Albion College (Albion, MI), explores all aspects of cups and saucers, from those made of china, porcelain, glass, stainless steel, brass, or enamel, to those of paper, plastic, or fiber, and those reflecting Art Deco, Mid-Century Modern, or contemporary styles of art. Also on display will be relevant images, from Pop Art to the fur-lined cup, saucer and spoon at MoMA. Margaret tells us, “It will make viewers rethink their definition of ‘cup and saucer’.”

Online finds and podcasts:
• Since 2017, writers around the world have been contributing photo-rich stories to Whetstone (https://www.whetstonemagazine.com), a print magazine on food origins and culture. Its Volume 5 (Dec. 2019) includes Tunde Wey’s poetic rumination on Nigerian cuisine, and stories on the evolving diet of the Shan of Northern Thailand, the traditional communal ovens of Morocco, oolong tea in Taiwan, mountain food from the Beskids of Poland, the origins of peanuts in Bolivia, preserving Black culinary culture in Loaiza, Puerto Rico, and more. There are also podcasts available on the website.
• Also in 2017, the Institute of Historical Research, which is based at the Univ. of London, launched a Food History Seminar to provide an inclusive setting in which food historians, academics, and other experts can come together to discuss research. Its website (https://foodhistoryseminar.wordpress.com) includes podcasts of past seminars.
• The cleverly-named “Ox Tales” (https://www.oxfordsymposium.org.uk/podcast) are podcasts from the world-famous Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, which is held every Summer at St. Catherine’s College at Oxford Univ. in England.

We note with sadness the passing of Ann Arborite Mary Hathaway on Oct. 6, 2019, at the age of 84. Mary was a wonderfully generous person and, for decades, an untiring community activist, including a stint in the 1970s as the chair of our town’s Historic District Commission. Along with her late husband John, she owned the historic Second Ward Public Building on South Ashley Street (popularly known as “Hathaway’s Hideaway”), which they thoughtfully maintained as a resource to be shared with many people and organizations. It was there that CHAA held its very first program on April 3, 1983. The member-participation roundtable that evening, “Gastronomic Events I Would Like to Have Attended or Would Like to Relive”, was near-legendary for the richly evocative detail with which the attendees described diverse flavors, meals, and culinary events of the past. (See Jan Longone’s fond recollection in the 20th-anniversary issue of Repast, Winter 2003.)
CHAA Calendar

(Except where noted, programs are scheduled for 3:00 – 5:00 p.m. and are held at the Ann Arbor District Library – Malletts Creek Branch, 3090 E. Eisenhower Parkway.)

Sunday, January 19, 2020
Margaret Carney, CHAA member and Director of the International Museum of Dinnerware Design, “Defining Cups and Saucers”

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

- Winter and Spring 2020: Immigrant Foods of Steel Country (Parts 2-3)

First Class