

German & Slavic Heritage in Pennsylvania

Immigrant Foods of Steel Country, Part 2



Jeff Swensen/ *The Wall Street Journal*, May 18, 2016

Pierogies Plus sells about 300 dozen pierogies daily in 35 varieties. The business, founded and owned by a Polish immigrant woman, is located in a converted gas station in McKees Rocks, about 5 miles northwest of Pittsburgh.

MORSELS & TIDBITS

“Resetting the Table”, an exhibit exploring the history of food choices and eating habits in the U.S., is running from Nov. 16, 2019 to Nov. 28, 2021 at the Peabody Museum of Archeology and Ethnology at Harvard University. Guest-curated by **Joyce Chaplin**, a Harvard history professor, the exhibit explores the influence of social, political, economic, and technological forces on diet, and broaches issues of social privilege and exclusion. Items on display include ancient Central American tools and ceramics related to corn and chocolate; an intricately-fashioned eel pot from 19th-Century New England; a wine bottle brought to the U.S. from Germany in the same century; the menu and dining table from a meal served to Harvard freshmen celebrating the end of their school year in 1910; a life-sized diorama of an early 20th-Century kitchen; and much more.

CHAA member **Margaret Carney**, Director of the International Museum of Dinnerware Design, announced an exhibit “Sculptural Dinnerware” running Mar. 16 – Jun. 5, 2020, in the Gifts of Art Gallery at the Univ. of Michigan’s Taubman Health Center. As Dr. Carney explains, “Dining is a multi-dimensional experience. It involves all the senses. While all dining implements (plates, flatware, stemware) have three dimensions, some are created more sculpturally than others. In fact, some *are* sculpture.... This exhibition features sculptural artwork that will make the viewer stop and look.”

The exhibit “African/American: Making the Nation’s Table” is scheduled to open on Apr. 3, 2020 at the Africa Center on Central Park in East Harlem, Manhattan. Produced by the Museum of Food and Drink (Brooklyn, NY), and with lead curator **Jessica B. Harris**, the renowned historian of African-American food, the exhibit reveals and celebrates the stories of countless Black farmers, chefs, cooks, mixologists, innovators, entrepreneurs, and food and drink producers who have shaped our national culinary identity and laid the foundation for American food culture. The artifacts include the historic *Ebony* Magazine Test Kitchen. Visitors can also enjoy tastings designed by top African American chefs.

Claudia Roden was given the Lifetime Achievement Award for 2019 at the *Observer Food Monthly* magazine awards from The Guardian group in England. Roden, who is currently President of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, grew up in the Jewish community of Cairo, Egypt, in the 1940s. Her writing, including *A Book of Middle Eastern Food* (1968) and *The Book of Jewish Food* (1996), is steeped in history and culture.

There are several upcoming conferences in Europe:

- Apr. 18, 2020: 35th annual Leeds Symposium on Food History and Traditions, at Friends’ Meeting House, Friargate, York, England, with the theme “Food and Health”.
- May 26-27, 2020: Fourth biennial Dublin Gastronomy Symposium, at the School of Culinary Arts & Food Technology, Dublin Institute of Technology, Dublin, Ireland, with the theme “Food and Disruption: What Shall We Eat Tomorrow?”. Disruptors in food history include people, movements, technological advancements, and disasters.
- Jun. 4-5, 2020: Sixth annual International Convention on Food History and Food Studies, at François-Rabelais Univ., Tours, France, organized by the European Institute for Food History and Cultures (IEHCA) with a multi-disciplinary focus covering all time periods.
- Jul. 10-12, 2020: Annual Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, at St. Catherine’s College, Oxford, England, with the theme “Herbs and Spices”. ■

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CARPATHO-RUSYNS AND THE INFLUENCE OF CARPATHIAN CUISINE IN PENNSYLVANIA

by John J. Righetti

John J. Righetti is owner and primary cook for Old World Catering, a catering business based in Ambridge, PA, just northwest of Pittsburgh and serving Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia. Old World specializes in the cuisines of Eastern Europe, northern Italy, and the Middle East. John grew up in Monessen, PA, south of Pittsburgh. In the 1970s he founded and directed the Carpathian Youth Choir and Dancers of Monessen, and for 10 years he taught Carpatho-Rusyn song and dance to ethnic performing ensembles. He was Founding President (1994-2012) and is now Emeritus President of the Carpatho-Rusyn Society, which has headquarters in Munhall, PA, just southeast of Pittsburgh, and additional chapters in Youngstown, OH, and other cities across the U.S. He learned about southern and eastern European cooking on his many trips overseas during the past 25 years.

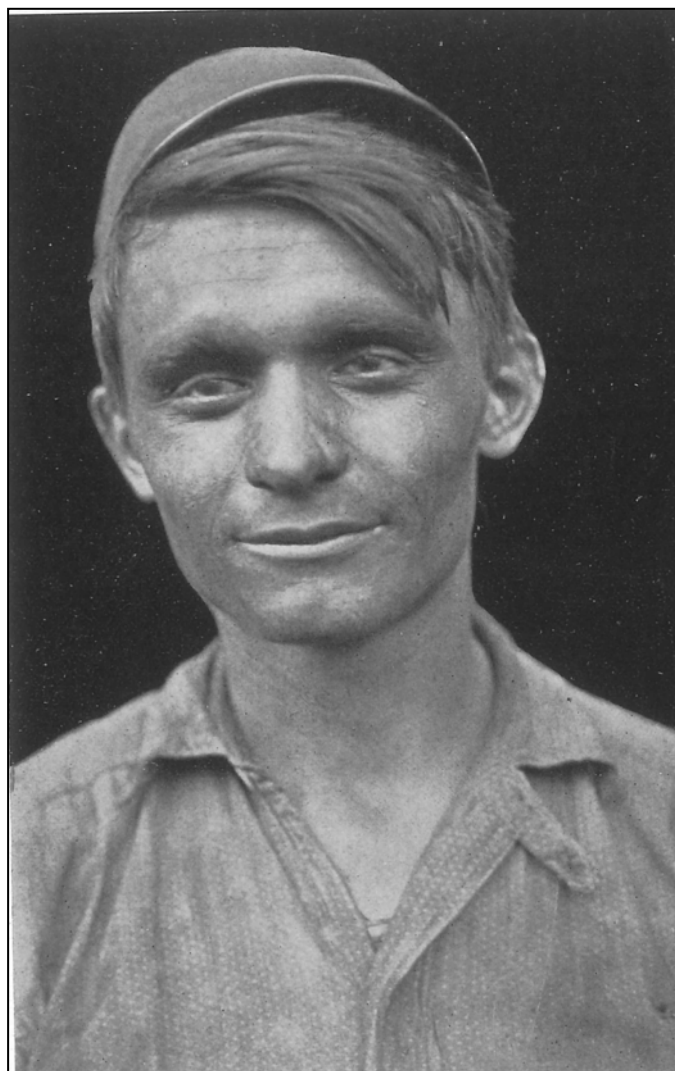
If you walk the streets of most northeastern industrial cities and ask people who the Carpatho-Rusyns are, you would be lucky to find a single one who could answer your question. But ask the same people whether they eat *pirohy*, *halushky*, stuffed cabbage, *kobasy* and kraut, *palachinky*, *kolache*, nut rolls and poppyseed rolls, *paska* bread... well, many would say they are familiar with these foods and many consume them on a regular basis.

Food introduced to American cuisine by Carpatho-Rusyns and other immigrants of the Carpathian Mountains of Eastern Europe has become a mainstay of the cuisine of the industrial northeast.

Who Were the Carpatho-Rusyn Immigrants?

In Europe, the Carpatho-Rusyn people had lived in the rugged region of the Ukrainian Carpathians since the early Middle Ages. Their language is Rusyn, part of the East Slavic family. In the 1800s, the crushing poverty in Galicia and other parts of Austria-Hungary prompted many Rusyns to seek a better life via emigration to the West.

The base for the development and evolution of Carpathian immigrant food and culture in the U.S. consists of two pockets of population whose ancestors were attracted to work in the coalfields and the associated industry. The first pocket is in southwestern Pennsylvania and the adjoining fringes of West Virginia and Ohio. The second is in northeastern Pennsylvania in a wide stretch of territory around Wilkes Barre and descending down the Panther Valley. The Appalachian coal fields in the northeast are mostly open-pit anthracite mines, while the Allegheny fields in the southwest are mostly underground bituminous mines. These were the earliest large settlements of Carpatho-Rusyns in the United States—in fact,



A young Slavic immigrant worker in the Pittsburgh steel district. Photo by Lewis W. Hine for The Pittsburgh Survey, from *Charities and the Commons*, 21:14 (Jan. 2, 1909).

the first settlement was in northeastern Pennsylvania. The first Greek Catholic Church in America was founded there (Greek Catholicism was the traditional faith of Rusyns at the time of immigration), and the country's first Greek Catholic priest lived there. The first Rusyn immigrants arriving in that region were a group referred to as Lemkos. They were Carpatho-Rusyn Greek Catholics from Galicia, which was a northern territory of Austria-Hungary that was governed nationally by German speakers in Vienna and locally by the Poles.

In the main, the immigrants were brought to the U.S. directly by the coal companies. There wasn't enough American

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labor to do all of the work that was available in the coal fields and steel mills at the time. One of the companies would usually pay for the worker’s transportation, and the amount would be deducted from his paychecks over time. He was often paid his wages in “script”, which was the company’s own form of money. With script, a worker could buy food and household items from the company-owned store, pay for healthcare from the company physician, etc. In essence, the entire economic life of the worker was managed by the company. America’s great capitalist coal industry was America’s greatest experiment in socialism!

The Shifting of Immigrant Foodways

When young Carpatho-Rusyn men first came to the U.S., they often came alone and had little control over their diet. But after 1900, some began to return to Europe to bring back brides and families. Housewives began to generate additional income for their families by taking in boarders— single young men who would sleep in the family’s house and have laundry done for them and meals cooked for them by the matron of the house. When household kitchens were run by women who had cooked ancestral Carpatho-Rusyn recipes for years, the food presented was traditional Carpatho-Rusyn cuisine, and we can be confident that the Rusyn boarders enjoyed it.

But as in every immigrant community, the food changed a little in the new country. Initially, this was based on three factors. First, certain ingredients that were needed for European dishes were unavailable in America. Second, most immigrants developed a liking for certain American food items. Third, certain food preparation patterns had to change due to the American industrial lifestyle. As a glaring example, no longer could lowland Rusyns cook *goulash* in large pots outdoors over

open fires for hours, as they had done in the Old World, because the men now had to be working in the mines for 16 hours a day. Thus, a new lifestyle in a new land tempered some of the Carpatho-Rusyn foods and their preparations.

In addition, the number of Carpatho-Rusyns settling in certain northeastern industrial communities was so large that over time, their non-Rusyn neighbors began to try the cuisine and to like it. By the time the first generation that had been born in America grew into adulthood, many non-Rusyns in such communities were enjoying Carpatho-Rusyn specialties. Italians, Lithuanians, and Greeks, especially, were beginning to enjoy Slavic favorites. By the time the second generation born in the U.S. were adults, Carpatho-Rusyn fare was a standard in many industrial communities that are now in the Rust Belt. By the third generation, these foods had become just standard household fare regardless of ethnicity. The acceptance of the immigrant foods into the American mainstream would inevitably change the foods, as we discuss below.

Living in America: Pirohy, Holubky, and Halushky

Perhaps the foremost Carpatho-Rusyn food to pervade industrial American communities and to become standard there was the pirohy. To be sure, some other Slavs made these as well, especially Slovaks, Ukrainians, and Poles. But it is notable that in most industrial towns, and especially in northeastern Pennsylvania and in the greater Pittsburgh area, the general population knew them by the Rusyn /Slovak term *pirohy*, not by the Polish term *pierogi* or the Ukrainian *varenky*. Further, the Rusyns brought pirohy to America in all of its forms— filled with potato and cheese, sauerkraut, sweet cabbage, *lekvar* (fruit jam), baked, deep fried, pan-fried— all of these can still be found in Rusyn households throughout the U.S.

But while Rusyns have contributed pirohy to multiethnic

communities all over, America also changed the pirohy. For example, in the U.S. today the most popular pirohy by far are those filled with potato and cheddar cheese. There simply is no such pirohy in Europe. Yes, there are potato- and cheese-filled pirohy, but the cheese used is farmer’s cheese, called *tvaroh* in the Carpathians. Tvaroh is a fresh, white, slightly moist cheese, milder than the dry,



A night scene in a Slavic lodging house in Pittsburgh. This room was occupied by 12 workers, two to three in each bed.

From Paul Underwood Kellogg, ed., *Wage-Earning Pittsburgh*, Vol. 6 from The Pittsburgh Survey (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1914).

Right:
Pirohy ready for
cooking

Below:
Potato dumplings
(halushky) with
creamy sheep's
cheese (bryndza) and
bacon

Photos: John Righetti



aged cheddar. Somehow, America worked cheddar cheese into pirohy stuffing.

Another classic standard Rusyn food that America changed dramatically is the stuffed cabbage leaves called *holubky* or *holubtsi* by Rusyns. No significant event in the Rusyn community is held without holubky. Its ingredients include meat and rice, which are imported items that simple Rusyn peasants didn't eat on a daily basis.

In America, holubky became cabbage leaves filled with a stuffing made of ground beef and rice, and cooked usually in a tomato sauce or with sauerkraut for long periods of time. Yet among Rusyns in Europe, ground beef is never used in holubky. There, the meat filling is always made with a pork product—usually ground pork, sometimes ham. Where did the ground beef come from? No doubt, it was cheaper and more plentiful in beef-rich USA and very soon, beef became the standard for holubky here.

Often, a novel recipe becomes so standardized in a community of immigrants and their neighbors that the descendants of the immigrants don't even realize what the standard recipe was in the Old Country. They might even believe that the old standard was used only for special occasions. Holubky is a perfect example of this last phenomenon. Holubky *was* an everyday food for Carpatho-Rusyns in the homeland, but the everyday variety of holubky was made with barley and chopped mushrooms, not with imported rice. Today in the American Rusyn community, everyday holubky is made with ground beef and rice, while mushroom/ barley holubky is made only for special occasions!— especially for Christmas Eve dinner, where all foods are required to be meatless and dairyless.

Thus, living in America has changed some basic recipes due to food accessibility; but living in America has also made Carpatho-Rusyn foods a standard part of the American diet, particularly in the Rust Belt cities and towns.

A final example is halushky. Most Americans who recognize the term will say that it is cabbage and noodles. But again, this is the “boiling down” of Rusyn cuisine within an American context.

In the Carpatho-Rusyn language, the word “halushky” is roughly the equivalent of the western term “pasta”. It refers to noodles or dumplings that can be combined with a wide variety of sauces and dressings to make for flavorful meals. For instance, one can eat halushky with buttered sautéed cabbage and onions and pepper, and this is very common. But one could also eat it with butter and dill; or with lekvar (fruit jam) and butter; or with dry cottage cheese; or with sauerkraut and bacon; etc. In the Carpathians, the most common style in which halushky is served is the dish *Bryndzovyj halusky so soloninom*, i.e., “potato dumplings with creamy sheep's cheese and bacon”. This is often served as a main course at lunch, or as a post-dinner course (almost like dessert).

Halushky is also a great study in how economics, topography, and climate influence what people eat. If you are Rusyn from the lowlands south of Kosice in Slovakia, then what you call halushky is generally broad flat noodles, perhaps one inch square. If you are from the mountains, then what you call halushky is generally potato dumplings. Why such a difference? In the lowlands, there is plenty of flat land on which to grow wheat; thus, noodles can easily be made. In the high-

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POLISH FOOD TRADITIONS AT ST. MARY OF CZESTOCHOWA PARISH

by Bernadette M. Bayne

Bernadette Bayne, née Konieczna (Koneski), is a lifelong resident of the New Kensington, PA, area, as well as a lifelong member of St. Mary of Czestochowa Church. Her father emigrated from Poland as a young boy with his parents and siblings, and her mother's parents were also immigrants from Poland. Bernadette was married to the late Richard L. Bayne for 55 years, and is a mother of three, grandmother of nine, and great-grandmother of four. She is an active member of her church and community. Keeping the Polish traditions and customs has always been important to her, especially during the holidays.

St. Mary of Czestochowa Church in New Kensington, Pennsylvania, has a rich Polish heritage. Polish immigrants established the Catholic parish here in the early 1890s. New Kensington lies just northeast of Pittsburgh and has cultural ties to nearby Natrona Heights.

The Polish Platter Fundraiser

Our biggest parish fundraiser is called the Polish Platter and is a dinner held in early October serving traditional Polish foods. The food preparations begin many weeks before the scheduled event, and require many volunteers to make it a success. It is a great social experience for all involved, and it helps preserve and promote Polish culture and food customs in our area.

Pierogies are a favorite part of the meal for many parishioners, and are usually prepared first (see my household version of the recipe on next page). Volunteers are needed to peel and cook the potatoes, mash the potatoes, and flavor them with grated longhorn cheese. Others are needed to peel and sauté the onions in the butter in which the pierogies will be cooked. Then there are those needed to form the potato balls that will be used as the filling for the dough.

The pierogi dough that we use is made from flour, sour cream, eggs, and water. The dough is rolled out and cut into round discs that are filled with the prepared potatoes. Each piece of dough is then pinched together to seal it— this is crucial to creating a beautiful and traditional pierogi. This task requires many hands, and many friendships have formed around the “pinching table”. The sealed pierogies are boiled, dipped in the butter and onion, and placed in containers to be frozen until needed.

Another favorite food item is the *golambki* or stuffed cabbage leaves. These can be a little tedious to make. The cabbage is steamed and the leaves are separated intact to make

the “blankets” ready for filling. The filling is made with rice, onions, parsley, salt, pepper and, of course, ground beef. Once mixed together the filling is formed into balls. These balls are then wrapped in the cabbage leaf, and the leaf ends are tucked in securely. The *golambki* are cooked in roasters in a sauce of tomatoes and tomato juice on the day of the dinner.

Of course, no Polish meal would be complete without *haluski* (cabbage and noodles) as well as *kielbasa* (Polish sausage). Green beans and bread and rolls are also included in the dinner. For dessert there are tasty treats made and donated by the parishioners.

On the day of the dinner, visitors can not only get a wonderful meal but can also browse the bake sale and pick up some treats for home. They will want to check out the country store where they can purchase homemade jellies, jams, and canned goods or craft items donated by parishioners. There is also a raffle or two!

The Polish Platter is a wonderful event that brings many parishioners together. Friendships have been made and stories shared from year to year. Volunteers span in age from the very young to the not so young but young at heart. Over the years the word has spread about the great food and friendly hospitality, so the event grows a little every time. If you are in the New Kensington area in early October, you might want to plan a stop for a dine-in or take-out Polish dinner. We will be happy to see you and serve you!

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The Poles of Pittsburgh

From the late 1700s until World War 2, the Polish-speaking territory in Europe was partitioned among the Kingdom of Prussia, the Russian Empire, and the Habsburg Monarchy. Living conditions there were poor for most Poles: there was little economic opportunity, men were often conscripted into the army, and the Polish language and culture were not allowed to thrive.

Polish immigration to the Pittsburgh industrial area began in the early 1870s following the Franco-Prussian War. Interestingly, the Poles tended to segregate themselves according to the occupied region from which they had emigrated. Thus, Pittsburgh had ethnic districts that were “German Polish”, “Russian Polish”, and “Austrian Polish”. In the census of 1910, there were more than 20,000 Poles living in the Pittsburgh area.

Most of the Polish immigrants were Roman Catholics, and they tended to arrive in families rather than as individual men, as was the case for many other ethnic groups. In general, the Poles were not as upwardly mobile as others: a steady job, church, and family life were their top priorities. The men had a reputation as hard workers, and tended to stay with one company their whole lives.

—RKS



The ladies of St. Mary of Czestochowa Parish preparing and serving food for the Polish Platter, including (near left) a tray of pierogies.



Pierogies

Makes enough for an average household.

To make the potato and cheese filling:

Peel 10 lbs. potatoes and boil until soft.

Mash the potatoes and while still warm, add grated longhorn cheese (to taste).

Add salt and pepper (to taste).

Hint: If watery, add instant potato flakes to soak up moisture.

To make the dough:

8 cups flour
4 Jumbo size eggs
16 oz. sour cream
16 oz. water.

Mix first three ingredients. Add water a little at a time until dough is workable (able to be rolled out).

To make the pierogies:

Break off a portion of the dough, and on a lightly floured surface roll it to 1/8-in. thickness. Cut out discs with a floured round cookie cutter (4-in. diameter).

Place 1 Tbsp. of filling in center of each disc. Moisten edges with water; fold disc in half and press edges to seal.

Repeat with remaining dough and filling.

In a 6-qt. stockpot, bring water to boil. Add pierogies in batches; reduce heat to a gentle simmer. Cook until pierogies float to the top and are tender, 2-3 minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon.

(If freezing before use: Sauté some chopped sweet onion in butter. Dredge the pierogies in this to coat them, and place them in an airtight container for freezing.)

In a large skillet, melt butter over medium-high heat. Add pierogies in batches; cook until golden brown, 1-3 minutes on each side, adding additional butter as necessary.

Placki Ziemniaczane (Potato Pancakes)

Makes 18 pancakes.

6 potatoes (1½ pounds)
2 small onions
2 small eggs
4 Tbsp. flour
2 tsp. salt
½ tsp. pepper
Canola oil for frying

Peel potatoes and grate on the fine side of the grater. Grate onion. Drain potatoes and onion.

In a bowl, beat eggs, stirring in flour, salt, and pepper until smooth. Add drained potatoes and onion, stirring until well combined.

Heat ¼ inch oil in frying pan over medium high heat. Add potato batter, ¼ cup at a time. Using the back of a spoon, spread the batter until the pancake is about ½ inch thick. Cook 2-3 mins. on each side. Hint: Depending on the size of the frying pan, you might be able to cook 3 pancakes at a time. You might need to shift or rotate the pan while cooking so that the pancakes cook uniformly.

Drain on paper towels.

POLISH FOOD

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The Christmas Wigilia Family Supper

One of the most important and memorable Polish Catholic traditions is the Christmas Wigilia (Christmas vigil). It is a time of great joy, love, and happiness spent with family. It does not begin until the first star appears in the sky on Christmas Eve, and is said to be a very magical time when animals can talk.

The Wigilia meal is meatless and does not begin until all in attendance have shared in the breaking of the *oplatki* (a rectangular wafer embossed with nativity images). At this time, wishes are exchanged for a Merry Christmas, health, and prosperity. Next there is the blessing of the food and a toast remembering the blessings of the past year and wishes for the coming year.

The meal is highly anticipated by all, each having their favorite food that they look forward to. There is always a white fish, pierogies, *Placki Ziemniaczane* or potato pancakes (see recipe on page 7), sauerkraut, lima beans, and stewed prunes. Over the years, my family has added some other dishes with shrimp and a vegetable or salad. Dessert is always a variety of home-baked Christmas cookies.

After dinner, the family gathers in the living room to exchange gifts and play games. Our family has grown over the years, and not all of them can be together on Christmas Eve, but it is warming to know that those who are unable to be with us still have the Christmas Wigilia as a wonderful memory.

Christmas is a beautiful time of year. It is because of the birth of Jesus that we have this special holiday and look forward to sharing it with family and friends. How wonderful that a precious baby born in a manger can have such an impact on the world. May we all carry the Christmas spirit throughout the year! ■

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lands, however, there is little room for wheat. But potatoes can be grown on small plots of land in the mountains; they are hearty and withstand harsh weather. Thus, the people in the mountains stretch their wheat flour by adding potatoes to it, making potato dumplings instead of noodles. Based on this, one can actually determine from which area in Europe a Carpatho-Rusyn family emigrated. They favor wheat noodles?: from the foothills of the Carpathians. Potato dumplings?: from the mountains.

Finally, halushky is a grand example of the transference of a food item from one group to another group in America. Not only do Americans of all backgrounds like to eat halushky (both kinds!), but another Slavic group settling in America has claimed it as their own food—at least in the coal patches and steel towns. I was once watching a popular cooking show in Pittsburgh on Public Television. At the beginning of a segment on Polish cooking, two women from a large Polish church in a section of Pittsburgh called Polish Hill were about to cook... and the Polish food they were going to make was halushky. This was fascinating to me because halushky is not a Polish food!

I immediately called a good friend of Polish heritage who works in a university Slavic department and asked her whether Poles make halushky? “No” she replied. This was later confirmed on my next trip to Poland. I went around to all the restaurants surrounding the main square in Krakow and asked whether they served halushky. None of them even knew what it was... not even the ones touting that they served traditional homemade Polish cuisine. But in Pittsburgh, and in many other communities like it, the Poles who came to work in the steel mills lived alongside Rusyns and learned to make inexpensive and delicious halushky, with its inherent Slavic flavors. They took it into their homes and adopted it into their cuisine.

There are so many more Carpatho-Rusyn foods that I could explore here, discussing how they are served in the United States. But the two main points are that (1) traditional Carpatho-Rusyn peasant foods have become standard “American” fare in places where Rusyns settled, and (2) the recipes have been adapted to fit America and its multiplicity of ethnicities. ■

A 1966 cohort at the Parish of St. Mary of Czestochowa



GROWING UP GERMAN-AMERICAN IN THE ALLEGHENIES

by Inge Kyler

Inge Logenburg Kyler of Eaton Rapids, MI, was raised in the 1940s on a farm near Clearfield, PA, a railroad and manufacturing (bricks and tiles) town in the Allegheny Mountains northeast of Pittsburgh. She is a self-employed writer and historian who has written dozens of books and poems for adults and children. Last year she published a story inspired by her own childhood, Brigitta, Little Girl in the Allegheny Mountains.

It wasn't long ago that I accidentally found out that my family was known as "the German family down in the valley". I grew up in the Allegheny Mountains during World War 2, and because both of my parents were from Germany, we were probably unknowingly viewed with suspicion.

My mother was 4½ years old when she came with her siblings and mother from the northwestern part of Germany. Grandfather Lipka was waiting for them in Pennsylvania. My father came when he was 20, from the same area. My mother's family and my father both settled in the Munson/Winburne area, northeast of Pittsburgh. Many families from Germany settled in that area due to the profitable coal mining industry.

Because my aunt, Tante Krause, had sponsored my father (during those years, all immigrants had to be sponsored), we visited both her and Onkel Krause almost every Sunday. My parents had settled in the Wolf Run area of Clearfield, PA, just after I was born, so it was an hour's drive, at least, to visit. Tante Krause served us warm fresh *kuchen* that she had just baked. It was a yeast coffee cake sprinkled with brown sugar, flour, butter, and cinnamon. She always gave us some to take home. Sometimes, still today, I prepare a *kuchen* in one bowl while mixing bread in another.

As a youngster it was boring for me to listen to the family converse in German during our visits, for although my parents spoke both English and German, I was never taught German and I know only a few words. When I wanted to study the language in high school, the course had been replaced by Spanish. Thus, my own knowledge of German is very limited. I was, however, able to use a few words that I had remembered when we went to Berlin last Summer with an alumni group from Spring Arbor University.

Back in fourth grade, when my girlfriend asked me what I would like her to serve me for lunch, I replied, "A wurst sandwich." She didn't have a clue what that meant! I was thinking of a salami sandwich, but I didn't know that *wurst* was my family's German word for what everyone else in the region called "salami" or "sausage".

Making Do on a Small Farm

A lot of commodities were rationed during those war years. We lived on a small farm of 20 acres with a cow and chickens. Mother milked the cow and served delicious whipped cream to top our breakfast cocoa. Most of our dinner meals consisted of lentil soup with prunes¹, or a fish soup that my father preferred, but which I wouldn't touch.

Beet soup remains a favorite of mine (see my recipe below). At home now in Eaton Rapids we grow a garden that includes beets, so I make a lot of beet soup during harvest season, and then I freeze the leftover soup for Winter use.

Growing up, I don't ever recall eating a beef roast or steak, although mother did make beef *sauerbrauten*, something I never really cared for. Occasionally she baked a pork roast. Sundays usually meant fried chicken (since we raised our own) and mashed potatoes. The feathers from the chickens were saved for pillow stuffing.

A specialty at home was the scrapple that mother made for my father from cornmeal and minced, leftover meats such as liver, heart, etc. My husband liked it, too. In fact, on one of our last visits with mother while she lived in Wayne, MI, she had laboriously prepared a dish of scrapple just for him. When we got back home to Lansing, we sadly realized that we had forgotten to take it with us.

My growing-up years were during "the last of the Depression" days and war-time. So it was frugal to harvest whatever berries were available and to preserve them for the Winter by canning. During the Summer, on early mornings my mother and I would go together to the mountains to gather huckleberries, wild cherries, and blackberries to put away for Winter delights. We made thin crepe-like pancakes using huckleberries and served them with sugar, and we enjoyed many huckleberry and blackberry pies throughout the cold Pennsylvania Winters.

Another favorite recipe, still today, is potato pancakes². I ordered some at a restaurant this past year, but they served them with syrup and applesauce. We never use either of those, but instead sprinkle our pancakes with sugar and/or jelly.

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Beet Soup

Serve with a side dish of mashed potatoes and crispy bacon.

Cook 4-5 beets in quart of water until tender.

Add a few beet leaves to the beets. When they are done, remove beets and leaves from the pot and let them cool, saving the cooking water.

Slip off skins and grate the beets. Chop leaves until fine.

To the grated beets and leaves, add ¾ quart cold water, 5 Tbsp. vinegar, 4 Tbsp. sugar, 1 Tbsp. salt.

Simmer, then heat to parboil.

GERMAN-AMERICAN *continued from page 9*

Pasta was never served at home. I didn't know what pizza was until we moved, during my high school years, to the Lansing, MI, area. Other home meals consisted of hot cabbage dishes, German meatballs, goulash, and a variety of soups. Today, German meatballs are one of my favorite recipes, along with boiled white potatoes and steamed carrots.

My father wouldn't touch corn or salads. He said that those foods were "for the cattle". (Sometimes these days, I agree with that assessment, as my system today has a hard time digesting greens.) Once in a while mother made her own sauerkraut. Red cabbage³ was and still is one of my favorite hot dishes. To this day I cannot prepare it like my mother did. Once in a while I find it at one of our monthly Bohemian gatherings at the local Liederkrantz Club, of which I am a member. There are a few German cooks who still know how to prepare it.

German Home Baking

Mother baked our own bread, although I was teased at school for bringing "poor man's bread" in my lunch box. According to my classmates, only poor people baked their own bread! But then I was also teased, or bullied by today's standards, for being German. I tried not to let it bother me as I was proud of my unique and wonderful parents.

On Friday nights mother made yeasted donuts, and from our supply of eggs she prepared the most delicious chocolate cake with seven-minute frosting, all from scratch. Angel food cake was one of her specialties, too. We also churned a lot of ice cream. Mother never received enough coupons to purchase sugar, it seemed, for all her baking, so she traded outgrown coats and shoes with a large family who lived over the mountain and who had more sugar coupons than they needed.

Christmas was a special time. It was then that mother bought a pound of poppy seed, ground it three times with the hand grinder on fine, prepared a yeasted dough, and combined the poppy seed with eggs and sugar. After it rose twice, it was rolled like a jellyroll and baked. Both of my parents are gone now, but it's not Christmas unless I, too, bake some of this poppy seed cake⁴. I don't always grind my poppy seed—sometimes I buy it in a can. However, the canned filling can never compare with home-ground.

One of my favorite recipes from my mother is for potato pudding (see my rendering on this page). It is actually not a pudding but a hot casserole dish that I prepare for holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas. My grandson, especially, loves it and is happy when there are leftovers that he can take home.

These recipes are making me hungry! Those are a few of the dishes that we prepared at home and some of which I still serve today. I remember one Thanksgiving when we were invited to have dinner with an aunt who lived in the Coalport, PA, area. She had a large family and a big dining room with a table covered in lace. She served turkey, and it was the first time I had ever eaten that. I thought, "Wow, she must be rich!" ■

Editor's Notes

1. Using pitted prunes in *Linsensuppe*, lentil soup, is a custom in northern Germany.
2. These are known in German as *Kartoffelpuffer*, or in some regions as *Reibekuchen*, *Reibepätzchen*, *Reiberdatschi*, or *Grumbeerpannekuche*.
3. *Rotkohl*, a sweet/sour side dish (read about a version from Milwaukee on p. 15, column 1).
4. *Mohnstriezel*.

Potato Pudding

2 eggs
1 small onion
5 raw potatoes
3 Tbsp. flour, not heaping
 $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. salt
3 Tbsp. oil
dash of pepper

Beat the egg yolks and whites with a beater.
Peel and grate the onion.
Peel and grate the potatoes, and drain off well the resulting juice.

Combine all ingredients and spoon the mixture into a baking dish, preferably a greased square dish.

Bake in oven at 400° F. for one hour. It should be crusty but not dried out. If it looks like it is browning too fast, then turn oven down to 350° F.

German Holiday Bread

This recipe was published in the Jan. 29, 1894 edition of the *Homestead Local News*, a newspaper in Homestead, the leading steel-mill town in the Pittsburgh area. It was reprinted in Daniel A. Karaczun, ed., *Out of This Kitchen: A History of the Ethnic Groups and Their Foods in the Steel Valley*, 2nd ed. (Pittsburgh, PA: Publassist, 2010), p. 21. The phrase "set a sponge" refers to the then-common method of making leavened bread: a "sponge" (also called a yeast starter or yeast preferment) is made by mixing flour, water, and yeast, and this is allowed to ferment overnight before it is combined with additional freshly made dough. The mixture is then kneaded and allowed to rest, resulting in a risen dough.

In the evening, set a sponge as usual for bread, in quantity enough for three loaves. In the morning, when fully risen, add one pound of brown sugar, one pint of dried apples or pears, minced fine, one pint of broken hickory or walnut meats, three tablespoonfuls of caraway and one of coriander seeds. Mix thoroughly, mold into loaves and bake when light. Wrap each loaf in a towel and put in a cool place. It will keep for several weeks.

WE ATE OUR WAY DOWN THE MIGHTY MISSISSIPP'

In the 30-year history of the theme meals that have been organized by the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor, just three have focused on the foods of a great river region of the world. First we journeyed down the Rhine River in August 2009, then we cruised along the Danube in December 2017, and last November 24 we ventured down the Mississippi from its source in Minnesota all the way to its mouth at the Gulf of Mexico.

Over two dozen members and friends of the CHAA participated in this event, selecting and preparing dishes from various Mississippi River states. We assembled that Sunday in the late afternoon inside the Ladies' Literary Club of Ypsilanti and took turns explaining what we'd prepared before we all sat down to taste what we had achieved.

The greater Mississippi River system, the fourth-longest in the world after the Nile, Amazon, and Yangtze, flows through the heart of the North American continent, so it makes a great organizing theme to explore the dishes and cuisines of America's Heartland. In the meal summary below, we focus on the culinary influence of four factors:

- the foodstuffs that indigenous tribes of the region were producing long before the arrival of Europeans
- the Spanish, French, and African people who arrived in the Louisiana territory in the 1700s
- the Germans who formed part of the great wave of European immigration in the 1800s
- the consumer convenience foods produced by American industry in the 1900s.

We have CHAA member Phil Zaret to thank for dreaming up the theme of "The Mighty Mississippi" and for organizing the meal. We also thank facility caretaker Jennie Taylor and congratulate her on her wedding, which took place only a few days after the meal!

Sioux Chef, Not Sous-Chef

Margaret Carney and Bill Walker brought to our meal a dish made from a recipe in the book written by Sean Sherman with Beth Dooley, *The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen*. It gave us an authentic taste of native foods of the region and a feel for how these foods are being adapted in the modern kitchen.

The dish that Margaret selected is Sean Sherman's *Psij na Čhajnákpa na Úma Čheupapi na Wathókeča T'áğa* (Wild Rice Pilaf with Wild Mushrooms, Roasted Chestnuts, and Dried Cranberries). Sherman, a chef of Lakota Sioux heritage, has said that he started to learn about wild mushrooms one Summer during college when he was part of a field survey crew hired by the U.S. Forest Service to identify native foodstuffs and medicinals in the northern Black Hills of South Dakota. He had grown up in the 1970s on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, and he later opened a series of restaurants and cafés in the Minneapolis area. Nearby, beside Shakopee, MN, is the home of a sovereign tribe of Dakota Sioux natives, the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux (Shakopee and Mdewakanton are English versions of their terms for "leader" and "dwellers at the spirit

waters", respectively). Wild mushrooms are also plentiful throughout the Mississippi headwaters region, where local tribes forage the North Woods for varieties such as morel, chanterelle, trumpet, chicken of the woods, and cèpe. In 2014 Sherman established Sioux Chef, a Minneapolis business focused on identifying and popularizing authentic indigenous foods of North America. Incidentally, Margaret herself is originally from Iowa, another historic homeland of the Dakota Sioux; in fact, the name "Iowa" is derived from the Dakota language.

The Shakopee and other tribes in Minnesota and Wisconsin, including the Ojibwe and Menominee, have centuries of experience harvesting wild rice from lakes and streams, and sap from maple, birch, and hickory trees (see sidebar on next page). A few other dishes at our meal were also inspired by native wild rice or maple sugar:

- Wild Rice and Chicken Salad [Marion and Nick Holt] is flavored with halved red grapes, fresh pineapple niblets, and sliced water chestnuts, dressed with mayonnaise and sour cream, and sprinkled with toasted pecans.
- Wild Rice and Hazelnut Salad [Howard Ando and Jane Wilkinson] also uses caramelized onions and passion fruit.
- Amaranth Bites [Margaret Carney and Bill Walker], another recipe in Sherman's book, are cookies made with flour from amaranth (a plant native to Mexico and Central America, used there since Aztec times) and granulated maple sugar.

Feeding the Big Easy

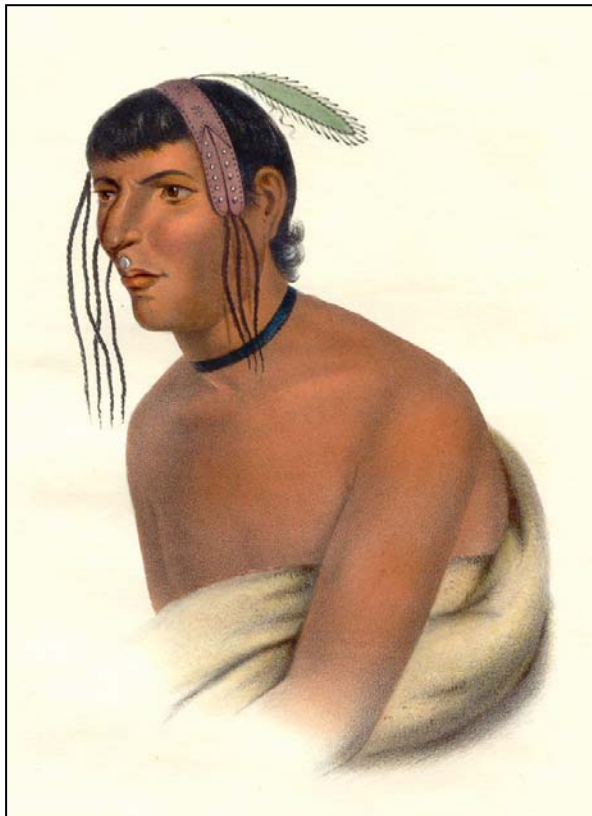
"The Mississippi River towns are comely, clean, well built, and pleasing to the eye, and cheering to the spirit. The Mississippi Valley is as reposeful as a dreamland, nothing worldly about it... nothing to hang a fret or a worry upon."

— Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (1883)

New Orleans, which sits on the Mississippi River near its mouth at the Gulf of Mexico, has seen a rich mixture of peoples and cultures drawn— or in the case of enslaved Africans, brought forcibly— to its docks and wharves. The French were the first Europeans to actually settle the Gulf's north central coast, beginning with Biloxi (1699), Mobile (1702), and Nouvelle Orléans, or New Orleans (1718). Control of the Louisiana territory reverted from France to Spain between 1762 and 1801. New influxes of French-speaking people were prompted by the British expulsion of Acadians (eventually pronounced "Cajuns") from maritime Canada (1755-64), and by the slave-led revolution in Haiti (1804) that occurred one year after the U.S. purchased Louisiana from France.

French culture made its way up the entire length of the river, as reflected in the names of river towns such as St. Louis, Ste. Geneviève, and Cap Girardeau in what is now Missouri; Dubuque, Iowa; and La Crosse and Prairie du Chien in Wisconsin. But it was mainly in what is now Louisiana, with its denser population, that French food and culture resisted, better than most ethnic folkways in the U.S., the trend toward homo-

continued on page 13



Above, Margaret Carney's dish of wild rice with mushrooms, chestnuts, and dried cranberries. Photo: Mariam Breed.

At left, Shakopee, a chief among the Dakota Sioux in what is now Minnesota. Painted by Charles Bird King; lithographed, colored, and published in Thomas L. McKenney and James Hall, *History of the Indian Tribes of North America* (Philadelphia, 1836-44). Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Native Staples: Wild Rice and Maple Sugar

The ethnologist Frances Densmore, in her 1928 field report on traditional Indian uses of plants in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Ontario, summed up: "The two most important vegetable foods were maple sugar and wild rice" (p. 308).

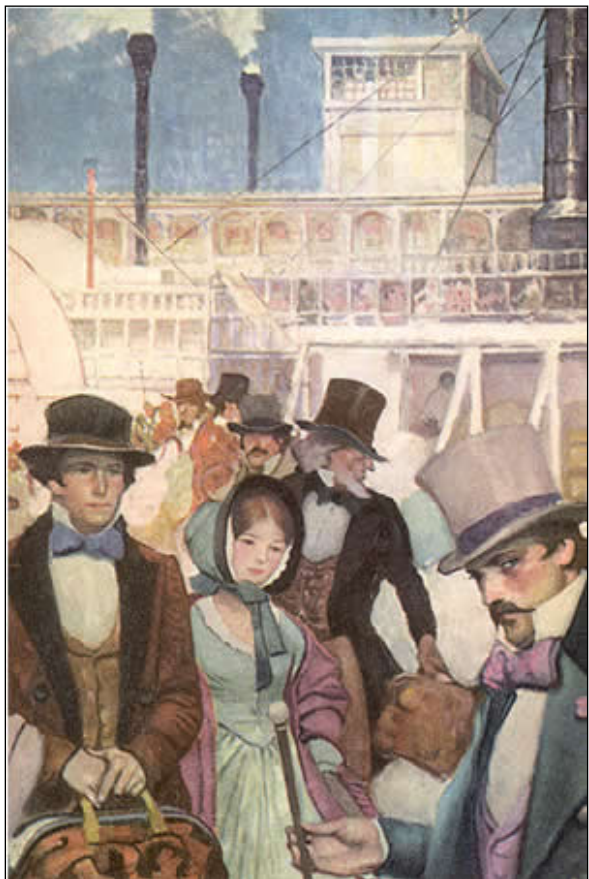
As with corn and beans, wild rice was easily dried for use in the Winter, and historically it was a key food of tribes in the Upper Mississippi Valley. It remains a fixture of their ancient lore and cultural identity. The traditional belief is that the aquatic plant beds are gardens of the Great Spirit, with a sacred and healing significance that transcends their status as a food source.

Wild rice (*manoomin* in Potawatomi) is actually a grass that grows in gently flowing, shallow (1-3 ft. deep) water from seeds dropped by the plants the previous year. The stalks of the lake species (*Zizania palustris*) grow up to 8 feet tall, and those of the river species (*Z. aquatica*) up to 13 ft. Every Fall, tribal families will re-establish their rice camps for harvest. In a two-man canoe, one man poles the boat forward, the other wields a pair of carved wooden sticks to collect the rice grains, using one stick to bend stalks over the boat, the other to knock the ripe seeds into the canoe hold. The gathered seeds are dried outdoors and then parched over a fire, since charred hulls are easier to loosen. The seeds are hulled by pounding or by "dancing" on them while wearing special moccasins. The final two steps are air-winnowing to remove the hull fragments and other chaff, and picking out

the broken or unhulled seeds by hand. CHAA has scheduled a speaker about wild rice on Oct. 18 (see calendar, p. 20).

Sugar was also produced along family lines, in a Spring ritual that naturalist and federal Indian agent Henry R. Schoolcraft described as "a sort of Indian carnival... a season of hilarity and feasting." At the family "sugar bush", tree trunks were gashed and the sap was gathered in wooden troughs or birch-bark baskets, then concentrated by boiling or freezing. On the order of 40 gallons of sap has to be boiled to make one gallon of syrup; if heated longer the syrup begins to crystallize, and it cools into a solid, raw sugar. Both syrup and sugar keep well, and were used as basic seasoning ingredients in cooking wild rice and other dishes. (Salt, not to mention spices, were rare in Minnesota and other parts of the Upper Mississippi before the arrival of Europeans.) Another common native use of the syrup was to rub it on meat and fish before the flesh was preserved by drying over a fire. Sugar was often used to season dried berries (such as cranberry, chokecherry, thornapple, and blueberry) after they were boiled for consumption (Densmore, pp. 321-2).

Incidentally, it was Schoolcraft, who lived in Sault Ste. Marie, MI, with his half-Ojibwe wife, Jane Johnston, who "discovered" and named the source of the Mississippi River. In 1832, on his travels to establish peaceful relations between the Ojibwe and Dakota tribes in Minnesota, he found the true headwaters of the great river and dubbed them Lake Itasca, his Latin contraction for "true head" (*verITAS CAput*).



Above, Judy Steeh's rice jambalaya with chicken, andouille sausage, and tomato. Photo: Mariam Breed.

At left, frontispiece from Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (Harper & Bros., 1917).

MIGHTY MISSISSIPPI' *continued from page 11*

genization and assimilation into the mainstream. Foodways there have remained one of the most distinctive subcultures in the American Heartland. "Of the many cooking styles practiced in the United States, it is the most fully developed, the one most deserving to be called a cuisine" opined Dale Brown 50 years ago in his Time-Life volume, *American Cooking* (p. 79).

Jambalaya [Judy Steeh] is the famous Louisiana dish of meats and vegetables stewed with white rice, versions of which are popular in both Creole and Cajun cuisine. Judy's delicious take on it was adapted from a recipe in *The Gourmet Cookbook*. The process starts by cooking in hot fat a base of diced onion, celery, and green pepper, known as a *mirepoix*, or nowadays as "the holy trinity" of Louisiana cooking. Cubed chicken, sliced *andouille* (smoked pork sausage), and diced tomato are added, and then everything is seasoned and cooked in a broth along with long-grain rice until the rice is done.

Although the exact origins of jambalaya are still disputed, there is general agreement that the dish is rooted in Mediterranean traditions from southern France, Spain, and Italy that were transplanted across the Atlantic after the Age of Discovery, and were combined there with Afro-Caribbean contributions. By some accounts, the Spanish colonists wanted to replicate their *paellas* and other stews of rice, chicken, and shrimp, but saffron wasn't available in the New World, and the tomato—first encountered by the Spanish in Mexico—was an interesting alternative. The French certainly contributed elements such as *andouille* and *mirepoix*; in the latter, carrot was replaced with green pepper, another New World ingredient. "Wet rice" from Africa (*Oryza glaberrima*) was the one grain

that the European settlers of the Mississippi Delta found could be grown reliably in that swampy region. It was introduced to Louisiana in 1719 when the Duc du Maine arrived with a shipload of 250 captives from Senegal that included one or more rice farmers. Seizing and enslaving people from the rice-based societies of West Africa meant transplanting not only their rice itself, but the labor, culture, and know-how associated with its cultivation, milling, and cookery.

There were several other Cajun- or Creole-inspired dishes at our meal:

- Louisiana shrimp dip [Nancy and Robert Harrington], garnished with chives and served with crackers
- Cajun corn bread [Jane Wilkinson and Howard Ando], made with cheddar cheese, ham, scallions, and jalapeño chilies
- Louisiana beef stew [Jane Wilkinson and Howard Ando], flavored with molasses, vinegar, ginger, and raisins
- Louisiana caramel bread pudding [Sherry Sundling] was made from a recipe in an old-timey cookbook written by a friend of Sherry's, Rick Rodgers. This is a delicious version of the well-known Bourbon bread pudding of New Orleans, embellished with the incorporation of caramel and the accompaniment of a whiskey sauce. Sherry baked the pudding in a casserole dish and beautifully garnished it with sliced strawberry and a sprig of fresh mint.
- Cajun chocolate chip cookies [Tom Senrad, a guest of Howard Ando and Jane Wilkinson]
- Roselawn Plantation Punch [Robin Watson].

continued on next page

MIGHTY MISSISSIPPI' *continued from page 13*

Whenever he came to New Orleans, the writer Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens) could indulge his lifelong fondness for dining upon sheepshead, a tough, bony fish taken from the waters of the river. For him, the fish symbolized the golden age of the steamboat, when some 12,000 paddlewheel vessels plied the waters of the Mississippi network. This was before the river was tamed by dams and levees, and before railroads took over as the nation's major transport. The dining rooms on the grand old riverboats were famous for their deep-black coffee, finely prepared dishes, and fresh hot biscuits (in the Old South, where cornmeal ruled, wheat flour was still a relative luxury). In the years leading up to the Civil War, Twain, who had grown up in the port town of Hannibal, MO, worked as a young steamboat pilot on the Mississippi. Later, in *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), he would recall that "there was but one permanent ambition" among boys living along the river: to be a steamboatman. Andrew Beahrs's book *Twain's Feast: Searching for America's Lost Foods in the Footsteps of Samuel Clemens* (2010) explores the prominent role played in Twain's appetite by his nostalgia for the Mississippi River and other places where he had lived and traveled. The book inspired an eight-part audiobook series *Twain's Feast* (Audible, 2018), each part featuring one course of a grand meal that was filmed at Twain's eventual home in Hartford, CT; the fifth course was sheepshead.

Biergartens in the Midwest

Germans fleeing Europe to seek a better life across the ocean were a major factor in the waves of immigration that arrived in the United States in the 1800s. They were heavily represented among those who settled in the Mississippi River Valley and other parts of the American Heartland.

In urban areas, the hard-working Germans started their own neighborhoods, churches, schools, and other establishments, including grocery stores and delicatessens, eateries, beer breweries, and weekend leisure parks called *biergartens*. In a large city, a *biergarten* might serve food and drink every Sunday to upwards of 3,000 people. Important German-immigrant breweries established in the Mississippi River states included Huber (Monroe, WI, 1845), Krug/Schlitz (Milwaukee, 1849), Blatz (Milwaukee, 1851), Miller (Milwaukee, 1855), Anheuser-Busch (St. Louis, 1860), Hamm's (St. Paul, MN, 1865), and Phillip Best/Pabst (Milwaukee, 1873). German beer made many cities in this region famous, and it was during this time that beer became the most popular alcoholic beverage in the U.S. Other German-immigrant firms in the region manufactured breads, pretzels, and other baked goods; various types of sausage and canned meats; *goetta*, a pork-oats scrapple (see *Repast*, Fall 2017, p. 11); and vinegar-pickled foods such as cucumbers, sauerkraut, mustard, and horseradish (see *Repast*, Spring 2019, p. 13).

Sauerbraten [Mae and Len Sander] is an elegant dish made by marinating beef shoulder in a sauce made sweet and sour with sugar and vinegar. The meat is then cooked in a stockpot for 2-3 hours, as with a pot roast. The marinade is thickened with flour and enriched with sour cream for use as a "gravy". Mae used a recipe from one of the biggest-selling cookbooks in the world: Irma S. Rombauer's *The Joy of Cooking*, first published in the 1930s (see sidebar at right). Mae and Len both grew up in Uni-

Irma Rombauer and German St. Louis

As a "gateway city" standing at the confluence of rivers, St. Louis attracted many immigrants. A German surge began in the mid-1830s, and by 1850 over half of the city's population was German. In the 1880s, when the city had swollen to many times its former numbers, the population was roughly 13% German. The Liederkrantz Club, which had been founded in 1870, met downtown and was the most exclusive social club among the city's German-Americans. The rise of the St. Louis stockyards in the late 1880s was accompanied by the growing popularity of such German-immigrant customs as sausages and the fried brain sandwich. The latter became, and remains, a local favorite: thinly sliced calf's brain battered and deep-fried, served between two slices of bread with condiments such as red onion, pickle, and hot mustard.

Except for some teenage years spent in Germany itself, Irma Rombauer lived her whole life in St. Louis. She was born Irma Starkloff in 1877 and grew up in the Deutschtum, a genteel German immigrant community in the southern reaches of the city. Married to Edgar Rombauer, a successful lawyer and local politician, for 30 years she was a very popular and confident socialite who liked to entertain. But in Feb. 1930, a few months after the stock market crash, Edgar committed suicide. Looking for a way to support herself, Irma began work on a cookbook later that year. It was published privately in 1931, and by Bobbs-Merrill starting in 1936. By the mid-1980s, it would sell over 10 million copies.

The Joy of Cooking was directed at women of means during those hard times of the 1930s—women who might have had to let go of their hired help, but who still wanted to present suitable meals for the occasional "company". Another factor in the book's great popularity was its casual style, which embraced bits of humor, advice, and stories about the author and her family. (Much more information about Rombauer's family and cookbook can be found in CHAA member Ann Larimore's outstanding review of Anne Mendelson's biography, *Stand Facing the Stove*, the cover story of our Summer 1998 issue.)

Historic German eateries in St. Louis included Bevo Mill, a lavish, many-roomed restaurant inside an authentic Dutch-style windmill of stone and stucco, founded by beer tycoon Augustus A. Busch, Sr., in 1916 (Bevo was a popular near-beer made by his company); and the House of Maret, a *biergarten*-inspired eatery on Lindbergh Boulevard, established by Bill Maret, Sr., and his wife Bertha in 1930. The Schneithorst family, which in 1939 had purchased Bevo Mill, established another German restaurant in 1956, the eponymous Schneithorst's—but it closed just one month after our meal, ending a 63-year run.

Mighty Mississippi Exhibit in St. Louis

The new “Mighty Mississippi” exhibit at the Missouri History Museum in St. Louis tells the story of North America’s greatest river. The exhibit, curated by David Lobbig, is free and runs Nov. 23, 2019 through April 18, 2021. Over 300 artifacts shed light on the impact that the river has had on the region now known as St. Louis and on the many people who have lived there. The coverage extends from the present all the way back before Indians erected the Cahokia Mounds just across the river in Illinois— the most visible remains of a mighty, corn-based civilization now called the Mississippian culture. For more information, visit www.mohistory.org.

versity City, a suburb of St. Louis. She wrote, “Other than toasted ravioli, which is from the Italian restaurant tradition of St. Louis, there aren’t many dishes that distinguish St. Louis from other parts of the Midwest. But at the time that I was born, Irma Rombauer lived around three blocks from my parents’ home. Growing up in St. Louis, I enjoyed this sauerbraten dish in German restaurants, which still maintained culinary memories of their origins.”

Our other German-American contribution, equally delicious, was a side-dish from Milwaukee: Karl Ratzsch’s Burgundy Red Cabbage [Glenda Bullock]. Glenda, who is from Wisconsin and used to live near Milwaukee, followed a recipe from Carol DeMasters, *Dining In— Milwaukee*, a 1981 collection of dishes from local eateries, in this case the Karl Ratzsch restaurant that was in business from 1904 until 2017. She chopped up some red cabbage, apple, onion, and bacon, combined these with sugar, vinegar, red wine, and several spices, and cooked this in a big pot for 20-30 minutes.

Convenient for Church Suppers

In Minnesota, especially among Lutherans, the term “hot dish” is used for what would elsewhere be called a “casserole”. The hot dish is the classic contribution to a church supper, which is a community potluck meal that is held as a social event right inside the church or on the church grounds. These days, the American church supper is— like the holiday fruitcake— an institution both loved and derided, giving the Minnesota humorist Garrison Keillor much room for fun on his “Prairie Home Companion” radio show. Actually, the church supper is a tradition not just in Minnesota but all the way up and down the Mississippi River Valley, as reflected in the following dishes at our theme meal.

Favorite Tuna Hot Dish [Laura and Dan Gillis] is a baked casserole of elbow macaroni, canned tuna, cream of mushroom soup, green peas, minced onion, and crushed potato chips. The use of macaroni (“it’s less messy than making spaghetti”) and tin cans of food (tuna, condensed soup, and peas) makes this an easy-breezy dish to throw together for a church supper or other gathering. And who could object to the 10 seconds needed to

crush the potato chips, which are used both as filler inside the dish and as an already-crispy *gratin* on top, bursting with flavor? Laura followed a recipe in Theresa Millang’s *The Great Minnesota Hot Dish*. On that same page, Millang reminisced: “My husband’s Aunt Mollie served this tuna hot dish to me when I first came to Minnesota as a bride. She served it with a molded lime gelatin salad. I serve it with a mixed greens salad... both good.” We only regret missing out on the lime Jell-O salad, but then again, we had other salads to savor...

Barbara Schwarz’s Rice Salad [Randy Schwartz and Mariam Breed] is named after the young woman who used it to win the Miss Fluffy Rice competition in Little Rock, AR, in 1975 (see sidebar below). The recipe was published alongside Tim Nutt’s interview with Schwarz in a 2012 issue of *Arkansauce*. The salad is a mixture of cooked long-grain white rice, mashed hard-cooked eggs, chopped onion, celery, sweet cucumber pickle, and pimento, and two commercial products: prepared salad dressing (essentially flavored mayonnaise) and “French” salad dressing (a bright-orange concoction that was very popular in the U.S. in the 1970s, essentially a vinaigrette flavored with tomato paste and corn syrup).

continued on next page

Rice is Queen in Arkansas

The single state of Arkansas accounts for roughly half of all U.S. production of white rice. Commercial rice farming in the state began in 1904 and is concentrated on farms in the Mississippi River valley. The Arkansas Rice Festival has been held in the tiny town of Weiner, AR, every October since 1976.

The rice salad recipe that propelled Barbara Schwarz, 17, to the throne of Miss Fluffy Rice in 1975 was devised by Nadine Bartholomew, her home economics teacher and a civic booster in Weiner. The recipe was tweaked a bit by Barbara, whose parents owned a 160-acre rice farm and were friends of Bartholomew. Besides preparing her dish for judges within a 90-minute window, each contestant also had to present a scrapbook documenting her promotion of rice, and give a speech about the role that rice had played in her life. Schwarz won a total of \$1,250 in the local and state contests. The money allowed her to attend college— the only one in her large family to do so. In fact, she became a professor at Arkansas State University.

In 2012, Prof. Schwarz was asked whether she still made the rice dish. Her good-humored reply indicates how culinary norms have shifted further in recent times:

I haven’t made my dish in several years. Current nutrition standards would judge my dish a cholesterol nightmare and a calorie count buster. The dish had six eggs, mayonnaise, and French dressing. I’m afraid it might be an entire day’s calories wrapped into a single serving!

MIGHTY MISSISSIPP' *continued from page 15*

Green Beans Smothered with Ham and Mushrooms [Sherry Sundling] is a delicious Minnesota hot dish that uses diced ham and both fresh mushrooms and dried wild ones. It is cooked on a stovetop in a large, covered skillet. In explaining his recipe, the aforementioned Rick Rodgers commented: "While I occasionally enjoy bright emerald, crisp green beans, more often I cook them the old-fashioned way: long-simmered to tenderness, sacrificing vibrant color for depth of taste." The emphasis on a big flavor instead of a bright color and crisp texture is what makes this dish best suited for church suppers and other large social meals. (Rodgers also commented that the Green Giant canning company is based in Minnesota, with roots back to 1903.) Sherry garnished her dish with rose blossoms that she fashioned out of tomato skins, and a sunburst that she carved from a button mushroom.

Iowa ham balls [Phil and Barbara Zaret] are a glazed, sweetened appetizer that is commonly served in Iowa at festive social occasions, such as church suppers, holiday meals, tailgate parties, Super Bowl games, and 4H meets. With nearly one-third of the hogs raised in the U.S., Iowa is the number-one pork producing state. Phil used a recipe from the Taste of Home web-

site. Two parts ground ham and one part ground beef are combined with eggs and milk, sweetened with graham-cracker crumbs, rolled into small balls, and coated with a tangy sauce made from tomato soup, vinegar, mustard, and brown sugar. The balls are then oven-baked on a pan for one hour.

Other dishes that could easily grace the table at a church supper:

- Prepared spaghetti [Robin Watson] is a classic for such gatherings, but this one featured the unusual choice of moist blue cheese. The *lagniappe* is that Robin selected Nauvoo Blue Cheese, produced by an old company in the small Mississippi River town of Nauvoo, IL.
- Corn pudding [Rita Goss] is made with eggs, milk, cream, flour, sugar, and baking powder for a deliciously sweet, custard-like consistency, and is baked in a casserole dish to achieve a golden-brown crust. Rita, who is originally from Kentucky, noted that the recipe is from the Old Stone Inn, a restaurant established in 1924 in a 1787 home in Simpsonville, KY, and was published in the "American Century in Food" issue of *Bon Appétit* (Sep. 1999, p. 26).

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At right, our meal's rice salad is tossed with a spoon just before being dressed.

Photo: Mariam Breed

Above, high school contestant Barbara Schwarz poses with Arkansas Gov. David Pryor in October 1975, when she was crowned Miss Fluffy Rice after preparing this salad.

Photo: Special Collections Dept., Univ. of Arkansas Libraries, via *Arkansauce*.



C.H.A.A. PROWLs

THE LATE-NIGHT CAFÉS, DINERS, AND SPEAKEASIES!

The Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor had so many “late nights” last Fall at cafés, speakeasies, diners, and other dives that we felt like inviting Guy Fieri along! These monthly meetings were arranged by outgoing Program Chair Laura Green Gillis. Elsewhere in this issue, we report on the CHAA November theme meal and on three other programs in Ann Arbor.

Shachar M. Pinsker, a professor of Judaic Studies and Middle Eastern Studies at the Univ. of Michigan, spoke to us on Sep. 15 about his book, *A Rich Brew: How Cafés Created Modern Jewish Culture* (2019). The book’s six chapters each focus on a particular city. Reviewing the early history of coffee, Dr. Pinsker noted that the first two cafés in Europe were opened in London (1652) and Oxford (1654) by migrants from Ottoman lands, a Greek Orthodox man and a Sephardic Jew, respectively. There was much debate over whether the new beverage was healthful and moral. With their Ottoman roots, coffee and cafés had an air of “the other”, the migratory, the transnational—but those are precisely historical traits of Jews. In addition, both Jews and Sufi Muslims found that coffee facilitated devotional studies and spirituality, including chanting late into the night.

Since preparing coffee was much more difficult than tea, it became closely associated with the cafés or coffeehouses where it was routinely brewed. As with taverns these were comfortable and homey, but in the absence of an intoxicating element there was space for intellectual discussion, newspapers, and artwork. Cafés were a democratizing force: Jews, Muslims, Christians, and others began to mix there. True, only men could enter, and they had to have a decent set of clothes, but once inside they could order a single cup and sip on it for a long while. Drinking and eating were not the center of the experience, but were the glue holding it together, Dr. Pinsker told us. He used the life of Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1888 – 1970), a Nobel-winning writer, to illustrate the role of cafés in the lives of Jewish intellectuals. Agnon had migrated from the impoverished *shtetls* of Galicia to urban Lvov, where he discovered that hanging out in cafés is ‘addictive’ because it allows people of like temperament to flock together and exchange ideas. It was at this time that Agnon became a writer. In his later peregrinations, he frequented cafés such as the Arkaden in Vienna; the Monopol in Berlin, which had a table where Hebrew was spoken; and the Café Vienna in Jerusalem, which was full of Jews fleeing Europe.

On Oct. 20 we heard the presentation “Order Up! The Henry Ford’s Lamy’s Diner” by **Donna R. Braden**, Senior Curator and Curator of Public Life at The Henry Ford, the well-known museum in Dearborn, MI. The Henry Ford acquired the defunct diner in 1984, moved it from Hudson, MA, and carefully

restored it as a functioning eatery within the museum, complete with period menus and period servers’ uniforms, paper straws, the marble counter, and chrome-plated stools with leatherette upholstery. The diner, a 40-seater made by the Worcester Lunch Car Co., had been opened for business in Marlborough in 1946 by WW2 veteran Clovis Lamy. He kept it open as much as 21 hours a day, serving French toast, a variety of sandwiches and burgers, beef stew, meatloaf, a boiled dinner, baked Italian sausage, donuts, and other items. The purchase of Lamy’s, part of the revival of diners in the U.S., came on a tip from dining car expert Richard J. S. Gutman. Gutman was retained as a consultant by the museum, and in 2019 he donated to it his world’s largest collection of diner artifacts.

Diners had evolved from horse-drawn lunch wagons (“night owls”), which were especially common in working-class New England towns. The museum’s 1890s Detroit specimen, which serves food outdoors, is believed to be the only surviving example in the U.S.; a young Henry Ford once bought from it a hot dog with mustard and horseradish. Over time, many lunch wagons converted to stationary status, with utility hookups and enclosed seating. In the 1920s, several firms began to make spacious, sparkling diners and railcar diners with tablecloths and waitresses, countering the formerly “seedy” reputation and appealing to families. The 1930s were the Golden Age of diners, many of them located along highways and offering clean, modern efficiency to a mobile populace. But the rise of fast-food eateries and drive-ins in the mid-1950s undermined interest in diners until the 1980s revival.

Detroit-based author and researcher **Mickey Lyons** (DetroitProhibition.com) spoke about Detroit Prohibition on Nov. 17. She noted that Detroit was the first major American city to “go dry”. But not too dry: with Windsor, ONT, sitting just across the river from Detroit, about 75% of all alcohol smuggled into the U.S. during Prohibition made that crossing. Canada’s halt in alcohol sales was only a wartime measure (1918-20), whereas those in Michigan (1918-33) and the U.S. (1920-33) were campaigns for social reform. The temperance and suffragette movements were closely intertwined. The Women’s Christian Temperance Union had been formed in Ohio in the 1870s, agitating against drinking for its role in domestic violence and family ruin. The 18th Amendment and the Volstead Act banned the manufacture, sale, or trafficking of all beverages more than 0.5% alcohol by volume. However, enforcement was sporadic, corrupted, and unfairly targeted at the lower classes. Most speakeasies were low-level, small-scale operations in working-class homes and neighborhood bars and fronts. The customers were men and women; this was one of the earliest spheres outside the home where female consumers could participate for pleasure rather than pay. In 1929 an estimated 15,000 speakeasies were operating in the Detroit area, and about 50,000 local residents were involved in illegal transport and smuggling. Criminal syndicates, most notoriously Detroit’s “Purple Gang”, controlled the business, including the “cutting plants” where bottled alcoholic beverages were diluted and adulterated; the foul swills that resulted helped propel the rise of the cocktail. Michigan was the first state to ratify the federal repeal amendment (Apr. 1933). ■

REPORTS ON OTHER ANN ARBOR FOOD TALKS

In addition to the monthly CHAA meetings, many members also attended one or more of the non-CHAA food history talks in Ann Arbor last Fall. Three of these are summarized below. We regret not having reports on two Univ. of Michigan events: an ‘annotated dinner’ called “Taste and Tell: Abrahamic Culinary Worlds” (Dec. 3), and the Conference on Global Chinese Food (Dec. 6).

Dr. Wiley’s Crusade for Pure Food in America

Toxicology journalist Deborah Blum spoke at the downtown Ann Arbor District Library on Oct. 22 about her book, *The Poison Squad: One Chemist’s Single-Minded Crusade for Food Safety at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (2018). Later, on Jan. 28, the WGBH-TV series “American Experience” aired an episode based on the book. Blum chronicled USDA chemist Harvey Wiley’s campaign against dangerous practices in the U.S. food industry, which eventually led to the Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act of 1906.

The FDA now estimates that in the 1800s, unsafe food was one of the top 10 causes of death in America, Blum said. Heavy metals were commonly used to dye candy and other foods, and sawdust and other bizarre substances were used to adulterate expensive coffee and spices. In this era before pasteurization and refrigeration, formaldehyde compounds and salicylic acid were added to preserve or “embalm” milk, beer, and meat.

In a USDA basement, Dr. Wiley did an experiment in which he observed the effects when a group of consenting young men ate food tainted with such chemicals. Dubbed “the Poison Squad” by the *Washington Post*, the episode raised public awareness of food impurities. Soon thereafter, the publication of Upton Sinclair’s novel about the meatpacking industry, *The Jungle* (1905), prompted Pres. Theodore Roosevelt to demand federal legislation. Unfortunately, the laws enacted in 1906 were soon watered down in backroom deals between industry and federal officials, and Wiley left government as a result. Instead he worked with activists in women’s groups and with progressive businessmen such as H. J. Heinz. Blum said that one lesson is that “one person can really make a difference when they plant their feet and refuse to give up”, but that on the other hand, commercial food in the U.S. today is far from perfect, because the regulations provide only a thin safety net.

How Swedish Foodways Evolved

“Swedish Food Cultures from the Viking Age Until Today, and How the 19th Century Swedish Food Culture Came to Be Preserved in Swedish-America” was the title of a Nov. 6 lecture by Richard Tellström, a professor of Food and Meal Science at the Univ. of Stockholm. Laced with humor and accompanied by a food spread, the dinnertime talk was organized by the Univ. of Michigan’s Scandinavian Studies Program and held in the Rackham Bldg.

Dr. Tellström noted that the long Winters in Sweden were an important factor shaping its food culture, putting a premium on food preservation. Methods included fermentation (as with sour ale and sour sausages), drying of bread and meat (since ca. 1000 CE), salting and smoking (also since medieval times), and sweetening (starting in the 1800s). Cultivated grains were traditionally used to make porridge, beer, and bread. Different forms of rye and barley bread were dominant in various regions, including varieties of *knäckebröd* (thin hardtack) that kept for months or years. In the 1800s, when wool and lanolin (sheep’s oil) became obsolescent, beef and pork supplanted lamb as the leading meats. But more important to the diet than meats were lake fish and salt-preserved sea fish, such as cod or other stockfish (*lutfisk*) and “sour herring” (*surströmming*). This last was salted, then fermented underground.

Historical church cookery books in Sweden, while very simple and brief, authentically reflect actual cooking of the time. From those rarely surviving books one learns such things as the preference for holiday foods that were white (to symbolize Christ), including rice porridge and codfish. The most important Swedish feasting time was at Christmas season, with lesser feasts for haymaking, harvest, and Lent. The Christmas or Yule meal (*julbord*) of peasant tradition featured a starting course of bread dipped in ham broth, followed by a main course of fish or meat (often freshly-slaughtered pork) and a final course of fruit soup, the whole thing washed down with beer. In the 17th Century, among the bourgeoisie there arose a custom of the *snapsbord* (schnapps table): beginning several hours before dinner, men and women would partake of bread, butter, cheese, meat or fish, and three types of *akvavit* (aquavit), a spirit distilled from grain and potato. This tradition gave way to the *smörgåsbord* (sandwiches table) of 5-9 dishes, which included the white *lutfisk* and *risgrynsgröt* (rice porridge), along with other food customs borrowed from wealthy Europeans, such as salted ham. This Christmas *smörgåsbord* merged with and finally supplanted the older *julbord*, eventually turning from a starter into a stand-alone meal.

Many Swedes, especially from Värmland, emigrated to Minnesota after 1870. Based on his research among those communities, Dr. Tellström theorizes that they tended to preserve older foodways such as the large *lutfisk* meal and the midday meal called *dopp i grytan* (literally “dip in the pot”), both of which are medieval. He’s also found that Swedish customs in Minnesota merged with those of Norwegians, Finns, etc., to create a generalized Scandinavian-American table. Mainstream Americans began to interpret *smörgåsbord* as a lavish, all-you-can-eat buffet. Back in Sweden, people actually admired this and adopted the custom as their own. In Sweden today, a family or restaurant Christmas *smörgåsbord* is a buffet combining old and new dishes, including some healthier foods. More generally, economic shifts since the 1960s have worked to decrease Swedish consumption of potato and rutabaga, and to increase meat consumption. Chicken and novel types of pizza are very popular there these days.

Italian Food in America: Tradition in the Big City

“Italian American Foodways: Migration and Politics of Taste” was a Nov. 22 talk given in the Michigan League by Simone Cinotto, a professor of Modern History at the University of Gastronomic Sciences (Pollenzo, Italy). Dr. Cinotto has written several books, among them *The Italian American Table: Food, Family, and Community in New York City* (2013). His talk was part of the fourth annual Week of Italian Cuisine in the World, one of about 1,500 events in 105 countries. Among the local sponsors were the Univ. of Michigan’s Dept. of Romance Languages and Literatures, the Dante Alighieri Society of Michigan, and the Consulate of Italy in Detroit.

Prof. Cinotto stated that Italian Americans placed food at the center of their immigrant experience, and theirs was the first real “ethnic food” to go mainstream in the U.S. As an entrée into the topic, he discussed the autobiographical painting “Family Supper” (1972) by Ralph Fasanella, a union worker and self-taught artist in New York. In that work, the home is feminized as well as ethnized: the artist portrays his father, a poor ice-delivery man who spoke little English, as a martyr, and his mother as a saint. Further, it depicts a very porous border between home and community. Italian-American food shops were not just economic centers, they were places to perpetuate cultural identity and to raise community leaders.

Chain migration was the norm. Before WW1, the typical Italian arriving in the U.S. was a male farmer who intended to return to Italy. In the mid-1800s a national identity had finally coalesced in Italy, yet in 1900 the country was still largely rural, with gaping cultural differences according to region and class. For instance, the poor people’s staple was cornmeal polenta in the north, and “black” bread in the south. In his *The Art of Eating Well* (Florence, 1891), Pellegrino Artusi wrote that because of Italy’s extended history of feudalism, its cuisine had no “center” or “canon” in the way that Paris set the standard for French cuisine, for example.

In the U.S., the immigrants from Italy encountered food that was more plentiful and was industrially made, although their demand for pasta, olive oil, tomato products, and cheese created the first significant food export market in Italy. Wherever they lived, the immigrants popularized foods such as broccoli, eggplant, zucchini, endive, chicory, and escarole. Often, one woman would cook for a boarding house of 30-40 immigrant men, and pasta was a perfect meal for this purpose. The men who had eaten fresh, garden-grown tomatoes and fresh, home-made, soft-wheat noodles in Italy were eating canned tomatoes and dried, factory-made, hard-wheat noodles in cities like New York.

In the 1970s, Cinotto said, the more recent New York arrival Marcella Hazan revealed that what had passed as Italian cuisine in the U.S. was a bastardization resulting when immigrant peasants encountered the mass industrialization of food. She went further and showed that authentic Italian cuisine is more than a repertoire of great ingredients and cooking methods, but a broad set of attitudes and practices that are supported by a cultural and economic context that was missing in U.S. cities. This context had included (a) the personal relationships that develop between food purveyors and consumers, and (b) preserving and cherishing the stories that underlie traditional (pre-industrial) production and preparation of food. ■

MIGHTY MISSISSIPP’ *continued from page 16*

- Very Good Bars [Laura and Dan Gillis] are soft, yummy chews made from just five ingredients: graham cracker crumbs, chocolate chips, chopped nuts, flaked coconut, and sweetened condensed milk. The ingredients are simply mixed together, spread into a pan, and baked for half an hour before slicing into bars. Presto! The recipe was contributed to a Minnesota community cookbook by one Doris S. Ehlers of Marshall, MN, home of the Schwan Food Co.
- No one living anywhere between North Mankato and Natchitoches could complain about pecan pie [Barbara and Phil Zaret]! Barb used a recipe from *The New York Times Southern Heritage Cookbook*. In a 2006 article about the history of the pecan, which is a native of North America, *Repast* contributor Edgar Rose wrote that Antoine, an African-American enslaved in Louisiana, achieved in 1846-47 the first grafting to enable commercial propagation of the pecan tree. Rose also noted that the earliest known book containing a pecan pie recipe is an 1899 charity cookbook from St. Louis, but that the popularity of pecan pie soared only in the 1930s after a recipe began to be printed on containers of Karo brand corn syrup. Prior to the introduction of Karo in 1902, the American housewife had to lug her syrup jug back and forth to the grocery store, where it would be refilled from the grocer’s barrel. ■

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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, March 15, 2020

[to be re-scheduled due to library closure]
Brad Hedeman, Zingerman’s Mail Order,
“Smoking Fish the Old Way in the Scottish Highlands”

Sunday, April 19, 2020

Lucy M. Long, Founder and Director, Center for
Food and Culture, Bowling Green, OH,
“Apples in the Midwestern Imagination”

Sunday, May 17, 2020

Eve Jochnowitz, Visiting Research Fellow
in Yiddish Studies at the Univ. of Michigan’s
Frankel Center for Judaic Studies,
“‘The Almighty Salad’: Jewish Vegetarianism
and the Backlash in the Yiddish Press”

Sunday, July 12, 2020

(4-7 p.m., Ladies’ Literary Club of Ypsilanti),
participatory theme meal,
“The Cuisines of the Caribbean”

Sunday, September 20, 2020

Frances Kai-Hwa Wang,
journalist, speaker, and educator,
“Chinese Food: Customs and Culture”

Sunday, October 18, 2020

Barbara J. Barton, endangered-species biologist,
“*Manoomin*: The Story of Wild Rice in Michigan”

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

- Spring 2020: Immigrant Foods of Steel Country (Part 3, Italian and Croatian foods)
- Summer 2020: Unthemed
- Fall 2020: Culinary History in England, Part 1

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