

## Fresh, Canned, or Dried— Worldwide!

### *Fruits of the World and How to Use Them, Part 1*



This calamansi tart, with a crust of crumbled SkyFlakes crackers and decorated with candied kumquats, was baked by Jennifer Meyer of Mississauga, Ontario. In the background (R to L) are calamansi fruits, calamansi curd, and candied kumquats. The citrus fruits calamansi and kumquat are popular Filipino ingredients— as are the SkyFlakes crackers— and the World War 2 era china plate was handed down from Jennifer’s grandparents in the Philippines. See her reminiscence inside, starting on page 13.

# MORSELS & TIDBITS

“A Perfect Pairing of Cookbooks and Dinnerware” is a new exhibit created jointly by Ann Arbor’s International Museum of Dinnerware Design (IMoDD) and the Janice Bluestein Longone Culinary Archive (JBLCA) at the Univ. of Michigan’s Special Collections Library. Running Jun. 30 – Sep. 29, 2022 in the Audubon Room at UM’s Hatcher Graduate Library, it features 12 pairs of artifacts, each consisting of an historical cookbook and a corresponding item or set of dinnerware. The exhibit was curated by UM Special Collections Archivist **Juli McLoone** and IMoDD Director and CHAA member Dr. **Margaret Carney**. The museum, currently celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, has also been busy for the past year organizing several online exhibits and an online lecture series; for more information, visit the website <http://dinnerwaremuseum.org>.

**Food History Weekend** in Washington, DC, scheduled for Oct. 13-15 this year, is an annual event organized by the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History. It brings together food innovators, activists, educators, entrepreneurs, chefs, and scholars for conversations, cooking demonstrations, and hands-on activities with museum visitors. The goal is to inspire a broader understanding of the history of food in the U.S. This year, the weekend will include presentation of the Julia Child Award to cookbook author **Grace Young**, who

has devoted her career to preserving and promoting Chinese home cooking and wok traditions. In 2020, as the pandemic unfolded, she worked to help save Chinatowns and Asian-American mom-and-pop businesses across the country. Ms. Young, 66, who grew up in San Francisco’s Chinatown and has lived in New York for 40 years, was also named 2022 Humanitarian of the Year by the James Beard Foundation. For more info, visit:

<https://americanhistory.si.edu/events/food-history-weekend>.

“I’ll Have What She’s Having’: The Jewish Deli” is a traveling exhibit that explores how Central and Eastern European immigrants imported and adapted traditions to create a uniquely American big-city restaurant. The show was curated by **Cate Thurston** and **Laura Mart** at the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles, where it runs Apr. 14 – Sep. 18 this year; then it moves on to the New-York Historical Society (Nov. 11, 2022 – Apr. 2, 2023), the Holocaust Museum Houston (May 4 – Aug. 13, 2023), and the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center in Skokie, IL (Oct. 22, 2023 – Apr. 14, 2024). For more info, visit <https://www.skirball.org>.

Congratulations to CHAA member **Yvonne R. Lockwood** of Chelsea, MI, who contributed a chapter, “A Fish Sandwich for All”, to a newly published collection, *Culture Work: Folklore for the Public Good* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2022). The book, edited by Tim Frandy and B. Marcus Cederström, documents how public work by folklorists can benefit society and improve quality of life by preserving cultural knowledge, amplifying local voices, and fostering community. Dr. Lockwood’s contribution is a revised version of her article about a fish sandwich tradition in Bay Port, MI, “Fish Caught the Man: The Life and Death of a Local Culinary Tradition” (*Repast*, Winter 2008). She is Curator Emerita of Folklife at the Michigan State University Museum.

Congratulations are also in order for freelance writer and CHAA member **Robin Watson** of Taylor, MI, for contributing more than two dozen bylined food articles to the *Detroit News* during the past two years. A small sampling of the headlines: “1866 African-American Cookbook from Michigan Woman Offers Voice from the Past”, “Bring a New Taste of Honey to the Rosh Hashanah Table”, “Abra Berens: A Michigan Chef Makes Her Mark”, and “Detroit’s Black Farmers Sow Seeds, Raise Hope”.

**Cynthia D. Bertelsen**’s culinary memoir and cookbook, *Stoves & Suitcases: Searching for Home in the World’s Kitchens* (2021), was named a “Best in the USA and the World” in the Food Writing category in the annual World Gourmand Cookbook Awards. Ms. Bertelsen is a writer, nutritionist, and food consultant who has lived and worked in Puerto Rico, Mexico, Paraguay, Haiti, Honduras, Morocco, Burkina Faso, and France. A longtime member of the Culinary Historians of Washington, DC (CHoW) who now lives in Gainesville, FL, she is well known for her many books and for “Gherkins and Tomatoes” (<http://gherkinstomatoes.com>), her acclaimed blog on food history and culture. A previous book, *A Hastiness of Cooks: A Practical Handbook for Use in Deciphering the Mysteries of Historic Recipes and Cookbooks* (2019), won a Gourmand Award for “Best in the USA and the World” in the Culinary History category and was reviewed in our Winter 2021 issue. Ms. Bertelsen’s article about the “Foods of the World” cookbook series (Time-Life Books, late 1960s/ early 1970s) appeared in *Repast* (Fall 2014). ■

## Repast


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# JUICY FRUITS, JUICY STORIES

by Randy K. Schwartz (Editor)

We anticipate a great harvest this Summer and Fall! Our plans for these two issues include coverage of some fruits that are not very familiar to most North Americans: the calamansi, damson, pawpaw, mayhaw, prickly pear, mango, and more. We want to learn about the history and culture surrounding these fruits, and also how they're eaten out of hand or used in other ways in the home kitchen.

The Latin phrase *pauca sed matura* ("few, but ripe") has been used to describe a small but choice harvest of fruit. It also describes the modest crop of fruit-focused articles that have appeared in previous issues of this quarterly. More than a decade ago, we did publish a "Fruits of the Earth" issue (*Repast*, Summer 2009); it covered the histories of the basic "ABCs" (apples, bananas, and citrus) that have been some of the most popular fruits on U.S. shopping lists for a century and a half. A few other articles about favorite American fruits have been scattered across our pages over the years:

- Fran Beauman, "King of Fruits: The Pineapple in Early America" (Summer 2006)
- Lucy M. Long, "The Grand Rapids [Ohio] Apple Butter Fest: Constructing Identity and Community through Food" (Winter 2008)
- Joanne and Art Cole's report on the autumn Persimmon Festival in Mitchell, Indiana (Fall 2010)
- Randy K. Schwartz, "The Rise of the Georgia Peach" (Winter 2013).

Today, we rely on a food system that is industrial and global. We can have groceries delivered to our front door by pressing a few buttons, and we take for granted the exotic variety of fruits and other foods that are available, some of them grown thousands of miles away. That allows us to forget just how hard-to-get and how prized these goods were to our hungry ancestors, and how profitable their trade has been for commercial growers and sellers. In shaping world history, sweet fruits have played an outsize role.

## Twenty-four Wallops for Watermelon Theft

A farmer's daughter, Gertrude Avery Klein, described her days growing up in a large German-American family more than a century ago in Livingston Co., Michigan, which is regionally famous for its muskmelons and watermelons. "No one in Livingston County could grow melons like Pa", she said, as recalled in a family memoir. If Farmer Avery discovered that even a single watermelon had been "cooned" (stolen at night) by neighbors or vagrants, he would "fly off the handle". "I can see him now," she added, "blue eyes flashing and every red whisker in his beard standing straight out from his chin."

One night in 1896, when she was 10, Gertrude herself was the guilty one:

It was near the end of August and the melons was thicker than spatters in the patch. Every day I'd beg to pick one. Pa'd say, "Hold your horses, Gert. They ain't ripe." But seems like I couldn't wait, so one evening when no one was around I wandered out to the patch. First thing I knew I stumbled and kicked a big one off the vine. I was scared stiff, but it was picked so I dropped it to smash it open. It was barely pink inside.... The next morning at breakfast Pa was madder than a wet hen. Thought the neighbor boys had been in the melon patch.<sup>1</sup>

But when the farmer closely questioned his children, and used a tape measure to compare their shoe sizes with the footprints in the field, he discovered that the thief was his own daughter. He gave her two dozen wallops with a razor strap—the first dozen for the mayhem in the patch, the second dozen for lying about it. Poor Gert—the flesh on her backside must've been deeper-red than the flesh of the watermelon!

## Chasing a Melon down the Merrimack

Earlier that century, another fiercely protective melon grower crossed paths with the writer and naturalist Henry David Thoreau. This farmer in New Hampshire raised mainly corn and hops, but he grew watermelons and muskmelons as a sideline. Because of the short growing season in the region, raising melons was tricky, and the good ones were considered treasures. Thoreau noted, with a mixture of alarm and amusement, that the farmer defended his crop from cooners by rigging up a tripwire rope to a loaded rifle!

It was at the end of August in 1839 when the 22-year-old Thoreau and his older brother John encountered this unnamed farmer and twice bought some melons from him while they rowed up and down the Merrimack River in their homemade boat. Thoreau recounted that they carefully picked out and purchased the biggest and ripest-looking watermelon in the patch. At one point they tethered it in the river to cool— but it broke loose, and they went to great lengths to paddle after it before they finally caught up with it far downstream. That melon was the dessert course for their supper— and the only other course was a loaf of homemade bread!<sup>2</sup>

The most surprising aspect of the story is that the two brothers felt perfectly satisfied by a meal of just bread and melon. In fact, near the end of his life, in a section about watermelons for his planned book *Wild Fruits*, Thoreau summed up that this fruit— or, technically, vegetable— is ideally suited to a hot-weather diet:

In the dog-days we come near to sustaining our lives on watermelon juice alone, like those who have fevers. I know of no more agreeable and nutritious food at this season than bread and butter and melons, and you need not be afraid of eating too much of the latter.<sup>3</sup>

*continued on next page*



The William J. Bryant West Indies Collection, Univ. of Central Florida.

"Banana Harvest", an oil painting by the Jamaican artist Headley Dacres.

## JUICY STORIES

*continued from page 3*

### Banana Republics, a Story that Began Quietly

The great value attached to fruit has also figured in a darker strand of human history. When the fruit trade advanced from rural farming to a larger scale, it became a hungry and avaricious industry — especially in the underdeveloped parts of the planet.

Yet Americans could be rather cavalier about it. The relatively enlightened Thoreau showed the prevailing ethnocentricity of his times when he exulted how merchant nations could import exotic fruits from the periphery of the world:

Such is Commerce, which shakes the cocoa-nut and bread-fruit tree in the remotest isle, and sooner or later dawns on the duskiest and most simple-minded savage.

He went on to claim that this enterprise of white merchants, who were sailing the seas to exchange “superfluous commodities” for fresh fruits, was so unobtrusive that it was “barely recognized” by the “savage inhabitants of some remote isle”.<sup>4</sup>

Thoreau didn’t foresee that these activities would amount to theft—“cooning” on a massive scale. In 1839, it was possible for an American to overlook it. After all, the large-scale importation of tropical fruits in the U.S. didn’t get underway until 1865-70, initially with bananas and pineapples from the Caribbean. But over time, the global commerce in bananas, pineapples, grapes, and palm and other fruits would dominate the lives and landscapes of large, unlucky swaths of the planet, a fact encoded in the phrase “banana republic”.

### An Ingredient for Slavery and Mutiny

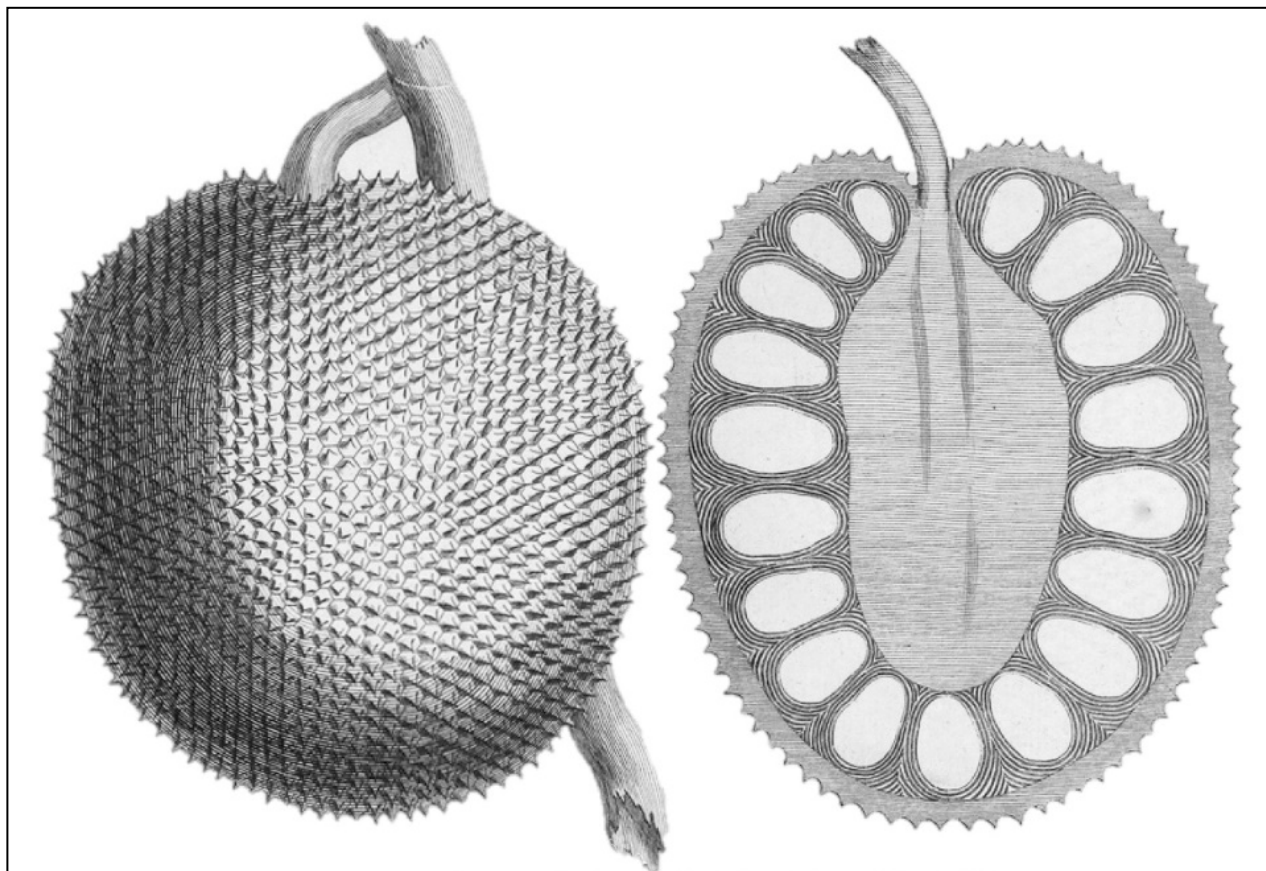
When Thoreau wrote of commerce that was shaking the “bread-fruit tree in the remotest isle”, he was referring to a lucrative harvest from groves in Tahiti, Tonga, Hawai’i, and other Polynesian islands. Called *’uru* in Tahitian, the alternate name “breadfruit” was coined by the crew of William Dampier, a British-born pirate.

The breadfruit’s edible ripe flesh has been likened to custard, while the roasted unripe flesh is said to have the texture and aroma of freshly-baked white bread, and a mild flavor like artichoke or white potato. Dampier wrote with hearty approval in 1697:

When the fruit is ripe it is yellow and soft; and the taste is sweet and pleasant. The natives of this island use it for bread: they gather it when full grown while it is green and hard; then they bake it in an oven, which scorches the rind and makes it black: but they scrape off the outside black crust and there remains a tender thin crust, and the inside is soft, tender, and white, like the crumb of a penny loaf.<sup>5</sup>

The plant, a member of the fig family, is easy to cultivate in the tropics and able to withstand hurricane winds. A single tree yields about 100 of the round, grapefruit-sized, nutrient-rich fruits every year.

All of this attracted the attention of British Caribbean sugar planters, who envisioned transplanting the breadfruit trees as a cheap, staple food source for their enslaved African workers. The Royal Society lobbied in favor of the idea.



National Tropical Botanical Garden, Kalaheo, Hawai'i (ntbg.org)

Drawing of a breadfruit from Pierre Sonnerat, *Voyage à Nouvelle Guinée* (1776), plates 58-59.

Accordingly, in 1787 the Royal Navy purchased a small merchant vessel, HMS *Bounty*, and refitted it as an armed ship dispatched on a mission to acquire 1,000 breadfruit plants in Tahiti and carry them to the West Indies.

Under the command of Capt. William Bligh, the *Bounty* reached Tahiti, where its crew presented the local chiefs with gifts; in return, the English king asked only for breadfruit plants. Reportedly, the islanders were happy to comply. They let the crew establish a nursery near shore, where for five months they grew saplings and potted them for stowage while subsisting on native yams and coconuts.

But on the voyage westward to the Caribbean in 1789, the 1,000 potted plants took up so much of the ship's space and resources that the sailors soon became miserable and furious. In the famous mutiny that followed, the crewmen dumped the precious saplings into the ocean and set Capt. Bligh and 18 of his loyalists adrift in the Pacific in an open launch!

The captain and his men actually survived, reaching Timor. In fact, Bligh, sailing a different ship from England in 1791-93, finally succeeded in transplanting Tahitian breadfruit trees to the Caribbean. After some initial resistance, the fruits became an important food source for Africans enslaved on Jamaica and other islands. Later in 1793 Bligh transported ackee (*Blighia sapida*), a fruit tree native to tropical West Africa, from Jamaica to the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, England, a deed for which the genus was named in his honor.

It is exactly because sweet fruits are so high in flavor and nutritional qualities that they've been used to sustain all sorts of people, from enslaved plantation laborers in the Caribbean to river-paddling Transcendentalists in New England. But the ackee and the breadfruit illustrate how the global story of fruits goes beyond their valued role in people's diets. The story also includes their role as valuable commodities that have figured in many intriguing episodes, including famous and infamous plots, plans, and enterprises. ■

### Endnotes

1. Bernice M. Chappel, *In the Palm of the Mitten: A Memory Book of the Early 1900s* (Brighton, MI: Great Lakes Books, 1981), pp. 45-46.
2. Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, Walden, The Maine Woods, Cape Cod* (New York: The Library of America, 1985), pp. 236-238, 257.
3. Bradley P. Dean, ed., *Wild Fruits: Thoreau's Rediscovered Last Manuscript* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2000), pp. 107-110.
4. *Concord and Merrimack*, p. 172.
5. William Dampier, *A New Voyage Round the World* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1937), Chap. 3, via Project Gutenberg of Australia, <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks05/0500461h.html#ch3>.

# THE WATERMELON AS AN AFRICAN- AMERICAN LEGACY OF THE SOUTH

by Howard Conyers

*Raised on a farm in Clarendon County, SC, Dr. Howard Conyers (<https://www.howardconyers.com>) is an aerospace engineer who has been employed at the NASA Stennis Space Center, near the Mississippi-Louisiana border, since 2009. He earned his master's and doctoral degrees at Duke University. An expert in barbecuing whole hogs— a skill that he had acquired by age 11— Howard has consulted and spoken widely in the U.S. about Black barbecue traditions and has been writing a book on the subject, *Black Hand in the Pit*. In 2018-19, he was the host of “Nourish”, a show produced by PBS Digital Studios to explore the people, culture, and science of Southern food. Dr. Conyers and his wife Kathryn live in New Orleans, where he also serves as a Research Fellow with the National Food & Beverage Foundation.*



As a person who enjoys eating seeded watermelons whenever they come into season, I will state emphatically that the watermelon should be seen as a fruit of pride for Black people and an educational classroom for others. Yes, the watermelon has been used in negative representations for years. Those depictions are crafted in order to stereotype Black people and make them feel that they are less than others. But amid all of that negativity, one can miss the positive aspects of the watermelon as a food that has been important in the American South— and beyond— for reasons that are obvious and not so obvious.

## The Original Gatorade of the South

In social media (hashtag #TeamSalt), there is a debate that surfaces periodically about how people prefer to eat their watermelon. When I was a child growing up in South Carolina, it was quite common to sprinkle salt on watermelon prior to eating it. In fact, one of my favorite memories of the countryside is of putting salt on the melon and spitting the seeds directly onto the ground. At that time, I added salt because I saw my family doing this simple act. In hindsight, as a barbecue pit-master who interacts with a lot of chefs, I realize that salt brings out sweetness more intensely on the taste buds, which is an effect also noticeable in salted caramel, sea salt on chocolate, etc.

Beyond simply a salty-sweet experience on the taste buds, salted watermelon has an additional impact on those eating it. Some time ago I had a conversation with my father, Harrison Conyers, Sr., in which he recollected how watermelons would be strategically placed in the cotton field during harvest. Later, as an engineer with a lot of training in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), I reflected on this conversation and realized that watermelon is a fruit with healthy sugars and electrolytes. Now if one adds salt to the watermelon, it creates an effect comparable to that of Gatorade or other energy drinks designed for replenishment of body electrolytes. The only nutritional difference between watermelon and such a beverage is that the first is 100% natural, while the second is full of many other ingredients whose names we might not even recognize— that is, it was concocted in a lab.

In a more recent conversation, I asked my father to elaborate on the watermelons in the cotton fields. Cotton was the major cash crop that was picked by hand growing up. My father said that after the crop started to come up in rows, there were places where no cotton plant emerged, and so watermelons would be planted in those spots. He specifically called this type of watermelon a “guinea”, and said that it was not as big as a regular watermelon and had a yellow flesh.<sup>1</sup> He said that if workers got tired or thirsty during harvest, the wat-

ermelon would be there in the field as a treat so they could keep working. It gave them a boost, which was really a rehydration mechanism. Furthermore, the watermelon provided a refreshing source of water that was clean, as I imagine that hands picking cotton would get extremely dirty. I could also imagine my family and others, once they were finished picking cotton for the day, eating watermelon with salt to help prevent muscle cramps.

### Untold Stories of the Origins of the Watermelon

For Black southerners, then, the watermelon was an important food. And even when they moved, it continued to have a place in their culture. After emancipation, the watermelon had become a tool for the economic empowerment of Black farmers in the South, who typically sold it from the 4<sup>th</sup> of July to Labor Day. When families came North during the Great Migrations to escape Jim Crow, truckloads of Southern-grown watermelons began to be seen in the streets of Northern cities such as Chicago, Detroit, Baltimore, and Brooklyn. It is not a coincidence that along with people in the South, Black people in the North also love watermelon—their elders and ancestors brought the cultural memory and palate for the melons with them. Through these and similar foods, they could still experience their home in the American South.

For those who descended from enslaved people in the United States, it is hard to recognize home in the South without understanding Africa, and vice versa. Watermelon is a great gift from the continent of Africa, along with other foods such as ok-

*continued on page 12*



Photo by KAZVorpál via Wikipedia.

Guinea melon (citron melon).

## Watermelon Ginger Beer

This batch drink can serve as an everyday accompaniment at breakfast, lunch, dinner, or with a snack. The recipe was adapted for *The New York Times* (Jun. 8, 2022) from the book *Watermelon and Red Birds: A Cookbook for Juneteenth and Black Celebrations* (Simon & Schuster, 2022), written by Nicole A. Taylor, who is an African-American chef and cookbook author from Georgia (<https://www.nicoleataylor.com>).

Yield: 4 drinks

- 2 Tbsp. fresh fennel fronds (optional)
- Filtered water
- 6 cups (1-inch) cubed red watermelon, from about 3 lbs. watermelon (see Note 1 below)
- 2 cups ginger beer, homemade or store-bought (see Note 2)

Divide the fennel fronds, if using, between two ice-cube trays. Fill with filtered water and freeze until solid, 4-8 hours.

Meanwhile, place the watermelon in a blender or food processor and blend until smooth. Scrape the sides of the blender or food processor using a rubber spatula and blend again. Place a fine metal sieve over a large bowl and strain the puréed watermelon through the sieve. (This should yield 2-3 cups of juice). Store in the refrigerator until ready to serve; it will keep in the refrigerator in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

To serve, fill four highball glasses or rocks glasses with the ice cubes. Stir the watermelon juice and add ½ cup to each glass. Top off with ½ cup ginger beer.

### Notes

1. Ideally, use a watermelon with seeds. (They can be hard to find; seedless melons work too.) If you own a juicer, proceed with the seeds and all, and don't worry about straining.
2. Unlike ginger ale, ginger beer is fermented. It's nonalcoholic and has a spicy kick and tends to have more flavor than the soft drink. If buying ginger beer from the store, try finding the options from Barritt's or Bruce Cost.

# “A FINE SPICY TASTE”



## AN INTRODUCTION TO DAMSON PLUMS

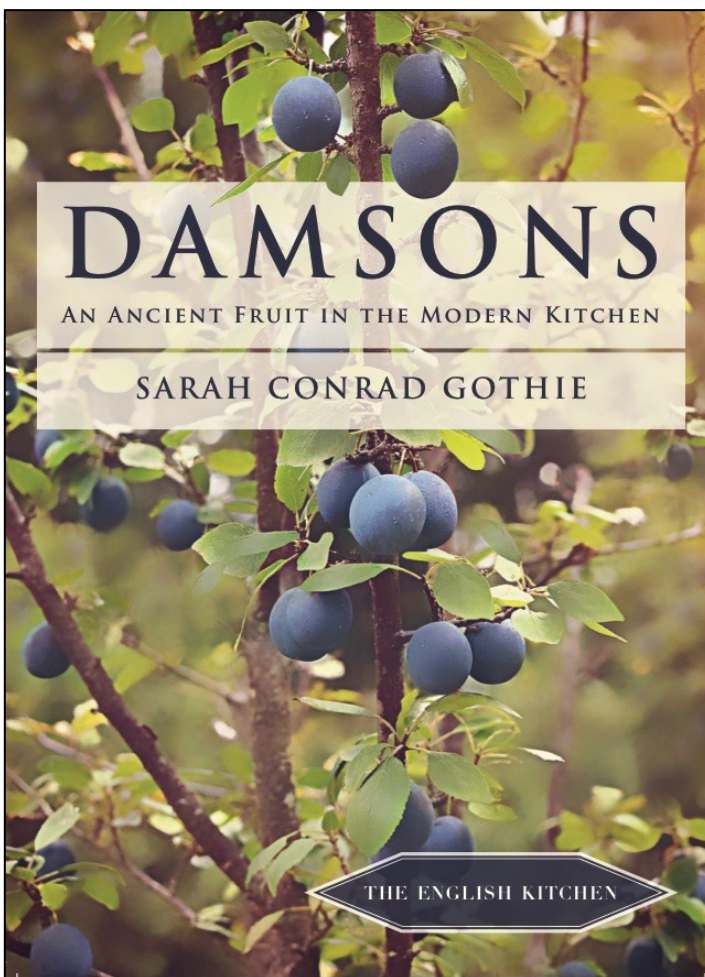
by Sarah Conrad Gothie

*Sarah Conrad Gothie is the author of Damsons: An Ancient Fruit in the Modern Kitchen (Prospect Books, 2018), from which she has excerpted and adapted the following article. She holds a Ph.D. in American Culture, with a Graduate Certificate in Museum Studies, from the Univ. of Michigan, and M.A. degrees in Popular Culture and in Literary Studies. Her research focuses on culinary history/heritage, literary tourism, and trends in 21<sup>st</sup>-Century domesticity. Dr. Gothie is currently drafting a book-length work about literary pilgrimages inspired by the writings of Canadian author L.M. Montgomery, to be followed by a treatise on marzipan. She resides in central Pennsylvania, and teaches academic and creative writing at Moore College of Art & Design in Philadelphia. Her Instagram posts (@sarahconradgothie) include damson content every September.*

Each year, as a child, I keenly anticipated the late-Summer day when my grandmother would make “plum butter”, a preserve that my grandfather treasured from his childhood. He was born in 1920 in Newry, PA, and plum butter was made from the plums that grew in the backyard of his family home. His youngest siblings, Wayne and Betty, recalled years later that their grandmother Rose, whose ancestors had come from Wales in the mid-1700s, would leave a pot of plum butter cooking on her wood-burning stove for hours. The recipe was passed from Rose to their mother, Jennie, and from Jennie to my grandmother, Marcella.

I could easily recreate my grandmother’s dish of beef with egg noodles, or her Christmas cookies that are colored and flavored with Jell-O powder, but the plum butter that she made every September was more elusive. Over the course of many hours, the dusky blue-skinned, yellow-fleshed fruits floating in the pot with sugar and water would melt into a burgundy-colored stew before thickening to a midnight-purple spread. Plum butter, I was taught from an early age, could only be made with *damson* plums.

Damson plums were tart, firm, uninviting little fruits about the size of a large grape, unpleasant to eat out of hand and never sold in grocery stores. The damsons for the plum butter of my childhood came from my grandfather’s friend Melvin’s tree, and after my grandfather passed away in 1990, my grandmother



stopped making it. About 15 years later I was able to place a special order for damsons through an Ohio farm market and to surprise my family at Christmas with the wonderfully-tart spread that we so fondly remembered.

It was by happy accident that, a few years after that, I found myself conducting dissertation research on Beatrix Potter mere miles from the damson orchards of the Lyth Valley in Cumbria, England, in a place where every person I spoke with knew what a damson was. Every farm shop that I visited in England’s Lake District offered multiple brands of damson jam, as well as chutneys and ketchups (and gin!) made with damsons. In the area of Cumbria formerly known as Westmorland, the fruit that had been an idiosyncrasy of my immediate family was a familiar feature of the local landscape and culinary heritage. I returned home committed to learning more about damson cultivation and use in England, and in that process my book was born.

### A Bit of Natural History

Damsons reside within the genus *Prunus*, which includes cherries, apricots, peaches, and plums. *Prunus* species share the attribute of a large central seed with a hard endocarp (a stone) and are commonly referred to as stone fruits. Of all the *Prunus* fruits, plums are the most diverse in their sizes, shapes, colors, textures, flavors, and scents. Based on archeological, geographical, and cytological data, and on the evaluation of physical characteristics





Sarah Conrad Gothie

Fresh picked damsons, showing the characteristic indigo-blue skin with a smudgy light-blue “bloom”.



Helen Platt

The author, enchanted by historic damson orchards of the Lyth Valley on her first visit to England’s Lake District.

(color, blossom structure, tree structure, and stones), damsons are classified as *Prunus insititia*—a separate species from the large, sweet plums (*P. domestica*) that one might eat out of hand.

Distinguished by their smaller-sized fruits and trees, their swollen stones, and their solid-colored skins with no intermediate shades, *P. insititia* includes damsons, bullaces, mirabelles, and St. Julien plums (a cultivar used primarily as a rootstock for grafting). The bullace is considered a wild form of damson, bearing a smaller, rounder fruit than cultivated damson varieties; the even smaller plum called the sloe (*P. spinose*) is considered a likely remote ancestor of damsons. Bullaces, like damsons, may be “black” (purple/blue) or “white” (yellow/green). Bullaces have been described as “closely allied” to damsons, since “the trees, blossoms and leaves seem identical, and on botanical grounds any discrimination would appear arbitrary”. Thus, H. V. Taylor concluded in the 1940s that the distinction between damsons and bullaces is unworthy of consideration, and dismissed the issue: “as these groups are relatively unimportant, no steps have been taken to settle matters”<sup>1</sup>. From a culinary perspective, the fruits are interchangeable, although some sources suggest the flavor and texture of bullaces make them inferior to damsons.

The name “damson” was derived from the fruit’s assumed origins near Damascus, Syria, a place where a variety of plums

were known to have grown, and this has contributed to muddled and inconsistent naming ever since. Texts in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries reference both “Damascena” and “damascene” plums, but these plums appear to be neither ancestral to, nor synonymous with, the plums today called damsons. John Gerard, who possessed a collection of over 60 plum cultivars, used the term “damson” to refer to some *P. domestica* varieties, as evidenced by an illustration in *The Herball* (1597) captioned “*Prunus Domestica: The Damson Tree*”. Jacques Daléchamps, in his *Historia generalis plantarum* (1586), described “Damascena” as having “dark skin, pleasant flesh, and a small stone”. “Pleasant” is not the first word that comes to mind upon tasting a raw damson! John Lawson, a historian who inventoried fruits cultivated in North Carolina in 1714, listed “damsons” as an item separate from the similarly-named “Damazeen”.

The late Alan Davidson provided an extensive list of translated names for damsons, an indication of the fruit’s possible aliases: *prune de damas* (French), *Dämaszenerpflaume* (German), *sustina di Damasco* or *prugna damaschina* (Italian), *ciruela damascena* (Spanish), *kræge* or *damascenerblomme* (Danish), *krikon* (Swedish), *damaskonluumu* (Finnish), *chernosliv* (Russian), *śliwka damaszka* (Polish), *bardaklija* or *damaška šljiva* (Serbo-Croat), and *damaskine* (Greek)<sup>3</sup>. To get an idea of the dif-

*continued on next page*

## Damson Purée to Use Now or Freeze for Later

For long-term storage, damsons may be frozen whole in airtight containers. For most uses, frozen damsons work just as well as fresh if they are frozen promptly and used immediately after thawing. Thawed damsons will be softer and juicier than fresh, and will give up their stones more easily. For less work later on, cook and sieve the damsons to make a purée before freezing. Pack in freezer bags, with all air pushed out before sealing, flatten, and stack in the freezer. Pre-made damson purée may be added to condiments, applesauce, ice cream, cheesecake, fruit tarts, and more.

To make damson purée: Note the weight of damsons being cooked. Simmer clean, ripe damsons with a little water (to prevent sticking before they release their juice) for 10-20 minutes. Rub through a sieve to remove stones and skins. If pulp is runnier than desired, return to a clean pan over medium-low heat, stirring frequently until the desired consistency is reached. To make sweetened puree, finish by stirring in a quarter to a third of the damson's initial weight in sugar over low heat until dissolved.

## Damson Jelly and Butter (2-in-1 Recipe)

This pair of recipes comes from a 1941 issue of Toronto's *Globe and Mail* newspaper<sup>2</sup>, featuring the handy suggestion of turning pulp left over from jelly-making into fruit butter with just a bit of additional work. Nothing goes to waste! This jelly is pure damson, dazzlingly clear. The butter made from the pulp is sieved for a silky-smooth texture.

To make the jelly: "Wash and prick Damsons, put in preserving kettle with just enough water to keep fruit from burning. Cook slowly until fruit is soft, then rub it through a coarse sieve. Then drain through a jelly bag. Measure juice, bring to boiling point, boil for five minutes, then add three quarters as much heated sugar as you had juice, stir, and again bring to the boiling point. Boil for three minutes, skim, and pour into sterilized jelly glasses." Finish covering/canning the jars.

To make the butter: Return to that jelly bag, and rub the pulp from it through a sieve, or else remove the stones by hand. Measure the amount of pulp produced, then: "Add the juice of one lemon for each 2 cups, add spices to taste\*, and 2 cups sugar for each 3 cups of pulp. Simmer slowly [...]. Care should be taken that the product does not scorch."

\*Cinnamon and star anise are good choices, or, omit spices.

## DAMSON PLUMS *continued from page 9*

difficulties involved, consider the fact that the first of these, the French *damas*, was described in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century as sweet and pleasant-tasting with free stones; the damson has none of those characteristics. More than a century ago, U. P. Hedrick asserted that only in England and America can one count on a plum called "damson" being a true *Prunus insititia* specimen<sup>4</sup>; this is important to remember if one is seeking the fruit for jam-making or other uses.

### A Versatile Ingredient

Damson flesh has "a fine spicy taste" that is "rather austere till highly ripened"<sup>5</sup>. In her *Book of Household Management* (1861), Mrs. Beeton described a "roughness" that makes damsons an unpopular fruit for eating out of hand. They "possess a delightful astringent flavor—but this is too pronounced, until the damsons have been cooked, to give enjoyment."<sup>6</sup> The assertive sharpness of damson flesh complements rich ingredients like butter, cream, cheese, and fatty cuts of meat, and pairs well with flavors of other stone fruits as well as berries, citrus, spices, vanilla, and chocolate. The high pectin content of the flesh makes damsons ideal for jams and jellies, as well as the fruit paste called "damson cheese", which is so named for its sliceable texture—similar to that of the quince paste called *membrillo*—and its aptness for the cheese board.

As someone who came to damsons through a simple jam, I was pleasantly surprised by the myriad damson recipes that awaited me in cookery books dating from the 1300s to the present day. Erbowle, for example, is a pudding recipe from the oldest known English cookery text, *The Forme of Cury* (1390), which was written for the master cooks of King Richard II and transcribed by Samuel Pegge in 1780. Erbowle combines "bolas"



Sarah Conrad Gothie

A plate showing fruits pulled from gin infusions at the farm of culinary historian Ivan Day in Shap, UK. Clockwise from top: bullaces, damsons, and sloes.

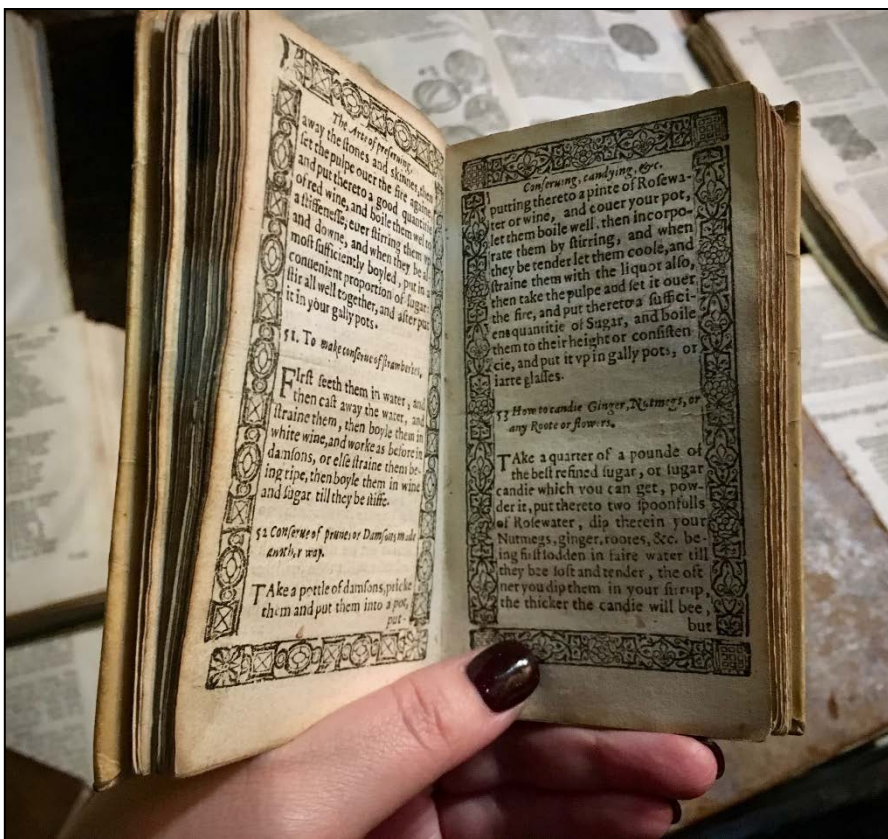
(a medieval spelling of bullace), red wine, honey, spices, and rice flour for a tart and gently-set dessert with an almost mousse-like lightness. In *Delightes for Ladies* (1609 edition), Sir Hugh Plat prescribed boiling damsons in either wine or rose water to make a damson conserve. To prepare Mrs. Rundell's 1808 Damson Froth, the fruit pulp is whipped with beaten egg whites, sweetened, and sculpted into peaks atop a trifle or custard. I was skeptical of the author's promise that this would stand "as high as you choose"<sup>7</sup>, but it does indeed fluff up impressively. Damsons may be best known for flavoring jams and gins, but they are remarkably versatile, succeeding across categories from sweet to savory.

### Damsons in America

In the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century, damsons were reported by John Josselyn to be the sole plum cultivated in colonial New England<sup>8</sup>, due in part to the colonists' preference for them, but probably also for the practical reason that black damsons tend to grow true to seed. An orange- and brandy-spiked damson preserve appeared in Amelia Simmons's *American Cookery* (1796), the first cookbook published in America.<sup>9</sup> Various damson cultivars received a thorough treatment in U. P. Hedrick's encyclopedic *The Plums of New York* (1911) and in agricultural bulletins and newsletters from Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, and other states in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. A 1928 report published by the Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station described more than 20 damson and bullace varieties, claiming for each some distinguishing characteristic. "Altho the demand for plums is limited," asserted its author, J. S. Shoemaker, "the value of damsons should not be overlooked. Their characteristic tart, spicy flavor makes them especially desirable for preserves and for other culinary purposes."<sup>10</sup>

A contributor to an issue of the *Indiana Farmer's Guide* in 1922 jauntily described Midwesterners' attitudes toward damsons: "If there is one thing the public goes daffy about it is Damson plums, regular sour Damsons. [...] Damsons have a peculiar flavor not found in any other plum and they are always sought for by the housewife and the supply rarely equals the demand." The writer suggested that although damsons were "highly esteemed" in the U.S. at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, by the 1920s they were already falling from favor: "While at one time they were a common sight in every chicken yard, the ravages of black knot and a general lack of interest has reduced them to a few families. They should be more widely planted."<sup>11</sup> Black knot—a common fungal affliction of *Prunus* trees—and the unpredictability of the damson harvest (bumper crops interspersed with lean years) are likely factors in the fruit's eventual commercial decline.

By the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, damsons in the United States were scarce. The Michigan Plum Growers Association (<http://www.michiganplum.org>) lists only three growers who spe-



Sarah Conrad Gothic

First edition of Sir Hugh Plat's *Delightes for Ladies*, from the private collection of culinary historian Ivan Day.

### Damson Clementine Liqueur

- 2 kg. / 4 lb. whole ripe damsons
- 1-1½ kg. / 2-3 lb. sugar
- A fifth (750 ml) of gin, 70 proof or higher, nothing fancy
- The peel from 1-2 clementine oranges

Wash the damsons, discarding stray leaves and stems. Prick the skins all over with a sterile needle, fondue fork, cake tester, or other pointy kitchen implement.

Combine the ingredients in a large glass jar with a tight-fitting lid. Store in a cool, dark cupboard, swishing periodically until sugar is dissolved, then let stand for at least three months.

Strain the infused spirits to remove the plums and peel. Repeated strainings through fine muslin will clarify the liquid further, but a bit of sediment at the bottom of the bottle is harmless. After at least one straining, the liqueur may be bottled for holiday gifts or personal use.

*continued on next page*

**DAMSON PLUMS***continued from page 11*

cifically advertise damsons. If you'd like to get some, try calling around to larger area fruit markets that might be willing to order them for you. Growing your own is also an option; trees are readily available from suppliers such as Gurney's Seed and Nursery Co. (Greendale, IN) or Stark Bro's Nurseries & Orchards (Louisiana, MO). However, patience may be in shorter supply, for damson trees take a notoriously long time to produce fruit. My own trees have not taken well to the poor, highly-acidic soil where I live, even with lime amendments, so I buy fruit annually from Marker-Miller Orchards (Winchester, VA). While a number of commercial jam makers sell damson jam, I've found those jams that I've tried to be too firmly set, and too forcefully sweetened. Sugar and cooking render tart damsons more palatable, but many commercial damson jams are cooked too long and sweetened too much, which suppresses the damson's vivacity.

**Conclusion**

Although damsons had always seemed unique to my family, my research and explorations affirm that they are not. People on both sides of the Atlantic continue to grow, consume, and cherish damsons. In the United Kingdom— where many damson orchards have been grubbed out and hedgerows removed to make way for large farm machinery or land development— community groups, heritage workers, and individuals have stepped up to restore and replace orchards, educate the public, and advocate for forgotten foods. Orchards are being created, regenerated, and preserved through the efforts of those who find value in food that is locally-grown, seasonal, and traditional. Such efforts restore the rich biodiversity of orchard habitats, maintain the characteristic look of the landscape, and ensure that damsons will be plentiful and accessible for years to come. Wouldn't it be wonderful to see a damson renaissance in the United States? ■

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**WATERMELON***continued from page 7*

ra, black-eyed peas, and African rice. The watermelon is still very prevalent in the markets of West Africa today. When I visited Cape Verde and Senegal in 2019, I was able to witness first-hand the many different varieties found on the continent. This was affirmation of what I had learned a year earlier when visiting a USDA seed bank in Charleston. The seed bank had a pictorial map that indicated the various kinds of watermelon that came out of Africa. This fact is hard to recognize in the U.S., where most varieties have English names: the famous Southern breeds of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century included the Georgia Rattlesnake, Crimson Sweet, Jubilee, Charleston Grey, Mountain Sweet, Lawson, and Bradford.

Thus, the real roots of watermelon are often stories yet untold, as with so many stories related to people of African descent in the U.S. For example, when you hear the story that is told of the Lawson watermelon<sup>2</sup>, you hear about how a Georgia military officer named Lawson was taken aboard a prison ship from the West Indies. There, a Scottish captain gave him some watermelon to eat. Lawson ate the watermelon but saved the seeds, and used them back in Georgia to cultivate what became the Lawson watermelon. He ended up sharing some of his seeds with a Nathaniel Bradford and another unknown breeder, who developed the Bradford watermelon in South Carolina and the Rattlesnake melon in Georgia, respectively. The ultra-sweet Bradford was especially coveted, but as I think about these melons, I realize that their African origin is hardly mentioned. This parallels the way that the innovations and contributions of African Americans in building the United States are hardly ever brought into the light.

Food has so many stories to tell. Enslaved Africans and their descendants really contributed in so many different ways to help build this country. Something as simple and delicious as the watermelon has a culture, a connection to place, a means for economic sustainability, and— less familiar to some— a rehydration mechanism for the people who toiled in the fields of the South. Taking the time to understand the history of the foods that we enjoy, we can learn so much about people and about the United States. ■

**Endnotes**

1. Editor's note: Guinea melon, a dialect term from the Old South, seems to refer to what is now classified as the citron melon (*Citrullus amarus*). Botanists now believe that the citron melon was domesticated in southern Africa— most likely in the Namib-Kalahari desert regions, where it is known today as the *tsamma*— and that the common watermelon (*C. lanatus*) originated in what is now Sudan and was domesticated in West Africa.
2. Notably in "The Bradford Watermelon Story", an episode from Season 2 of "Mind of a Chef", a series of brief televised spots created by Dr. David Shields. The Bradford family in South Carolina still markets their heirloom watermelons (<https://bradfordwatermelons.com>).

# EXPLORATION OF A FOOD MEMORY



## CALAMANSI AND THE TIES THAT BIND

by Jennifer Meyer

*Jennifer Meyer, the Volunteer Coordinator for the Culinary Historians of Canada, grew up and works in Mississauga, a suburb just west of Toronto. She was raised in a Filipino-Dutch home where food both divided and brought family together. Ms. Meyer has been a secondary school teacher for about 20 years and often brings culinary history into her classroom.*

Food memories can be intensely vivid. My father's love for his mother's cauliflower soup is so great that he feels that all other cauliflower soups pale in comparison and eats them with a slight frown. The jingling sound of an ice cream truck prompts a recollection of ice-cold sweetness and childish joy that are as hazy and dense as fog. The backbone of my strongest food memory is calamansi, a miniscule citrus fruit native to my mother's homeland, the Philippines.

Calamansi is a cross between kumquat and mandarin orange, but tastes more like lemon or lime. It has a misleading sweet aroma; the astringent juice will make your eyes bulge and water. Preserved versions such as extracts and powders are readily available in Asian grocery stores, but the fresh variety remains rare and challenging to find in the cool climes of Canada. Sometimes it is found in garden centers in plant form under its Americanized name, calamondin.

I became cognizant of calamansi while growing up in the 1980s. As with many daughters of Filipino mothers, I was enlisted to watch and help prepare meals. It was not unusual for my mother to sigh and say, "This would be better if we had calamansi", when she was making her traditional dishes like *pansit bihon*, a stir-fry with rice vermicelli noodles. Until a visit back to my mother's homeland in 1983, I had little idea what she was referring to. In Canada, lemon was the usual replacement for calamansi.

My mother had come to Canada by herself in December 1966 to work as a nurse at Soldiers' Memorial Hospital in Orillia, Ontario. She roomed across the street from the hospital with other women from the Philippines, although they were all from different parts of the thousands of islands that make up the nation. Her cooking skills were not fantastic; back in the Philippines her mother, my Lola (grandmother), had always preferred to buy prepared food and often said, "Why should I



A calamansi tree growing on the author's balcony in Mississauga.

waste the time to make something when someone else can make it better?" This philosophy was not feasible for my mother in the late 1960s in small-town Ontario. She learned to cook by experimenting, substituting, and of course from her housemates, who became her lifelong friends.

### Visiting a Filipino Village

The food memory that I have been chasing for decades started when my mother, brother and I went "back home" in 1983 when I was seven, and I had my first experience with fresh calamansi. We stayed in my grandmother's home village of Ballesteros in Cagayan province. There, my Lola's sisters, my great-aunts, lived in the Trilles family home where they were raised. Although elderly, they still ran the farm, hiring people to do the work they no longer could do by themselves.

The weather during our visit was intense in a myriad of ways. It was August, rainy season; the heat and humidity were all-encompassing. I was recovering from a water-borne illness— caught from a popsicle that my doting Lolo (grandfather) had bought for me in Manila— that had me briefly hospitalized, and I was still dehydrated and weak. Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino, a senator and vocal critic of President Ferdinand Marcos, had recently been assassinated, and Lolo, being a military officer, was suddenly too busy for us. We made

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Chris and Jennifer in Manila with the notorious popsicles that would make them sick, 1983.

garnered a stern warning from my mother, who said it might earn me a return trip to the hospital.

There were trees everywhere, and amongst the fruit trees was calamansi. I recognized the name and was curious. The juice is sometimes heated and given to children when they are sick, but thankfully my great-aunts made us something much better: calamansi-ade. It was ice cold, and some of the sugar was still crystallized. Nothing else during the entire month of that trip tasted better, and I have cherished this tiny, lime-like citrus fruit ever since.

Although communicating with them was challenging, I recognized that my great-aunts Hermogena, Valeriana, and Basalisa were forces of nature. They were elderly, tiny, and crouched-over, but fierce, swift, and independent. They never married, but helped raise their nieces and nephews, smoked cigars made with tobacco that they grew themselves, and ran the family farm long after their parents had passed on.

Learning to Cook Filipino Dishes

**CALAMANSI**

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the long journey north by jeep on rough, pock-marked roads to Ballesteros from Manila.

When we arrived in the village, it was dark in a way that I had never experienced before. The light pollution of Manila was long gone. The sounds of strange insects was loud and inescapable. In the middle of the night, safely tucked away in a netted bed, I felt shaking; I thought my brother Chris was trying to scare me. When we woke in the morning, we quickly learned that there had been an earthquake in the night. Everyone was unsettled, and exploring was cut to a minimum. Playing with the chickens, pigs, *carabao* (water buffalo), and kittens

My own ventures into making Filipino foods were sparse until my mother became sick. She increasingly wanted the comfort foods of her youth, and I was at a loss. Growing up, Chris and I had favored foods recognized by our peers and the other half of our Filipino-Dutch family. Essentially, we wanted to fit in, even at home. I had been remiss in paying attention to how my mom made Filipino food— I just did prep work when asked, without much thought and probably with a few complaints. It’s an odd sensation realizing that you neglected to learn to make the food of one half of your own heritage while embracing other cultures. I think I assumed that my mother would always be around to make it, to show me.



The Trilles family home in Ballesteros, Cagayan Valley.



Replacing lemon or lime in recipes with calamansi juice is an easy way to create new desserts. One of my favorites is a calamansi tart with a SkyFlakes cracker crust and candied kumquats as decoration, as shown in the accompanying photo [see front cover of this issue]. SkyFlakes are a Filipino brand of saltine-like crackers. My use of candied kumquats is like an ode to the very origins of the calamansi.

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At left, the author's great-aunts Hermogena, Valeriana, and Basalisa Trilles.

Below, the author's treasured china plate that her great-aunts had bought with hard-earned occupation pesos during World War 2 in the Philippines. The jars beside it hold calamansi curd and candied kumquats.

My early attempts were not met with much success. I was told that my flavors were off, or my noodles were over- or under-cooked, or was asked, "How did you make this?" followed by a grimace. I realized that I needed my mother's help and had a limited time to acquire it. My mom's staple kitchen reference, *The Philippine Cookbook* by Reynaldo Alejandro (1985), was a good base to start with. I moved on to *7000 Islands: A Food Portrait of the Philippines* by Yasmine Newman (2013). Newman's book was easier for me to identify with, given that she is Australian-Filipino. On good days we looked at the pictures and discussed the recipes, more as suggestions to my mother. I started to get a better feel for the food and flavors. My repertoire is not expansive, but my Filipino cooking has become "passable to good". My mother and I never got around to the desserts section beyond *buko* (coconut) pie, one of her favorites, and *carioca*, a doughnut-like treat that I would make at Christmas time.

I have never made a calamansi beverage as refreshing and satisfying as the one that my great-aunts made, and I likely never will. While chasing that food memory continues to be elusive, creating new memories is a fruitful hobby. Calamansi is not the star attraction in Filipino cuisine, with the rare exception of beverages. It is not traditionally a flavor in desserts, unlike lemon or lime. I appreciate calamansi's flavor and often use it in marinades, and I love the complexity that it adds to desserts.



# THE PAWPAW: AMERICA'S FORGOTTEN FRUIT

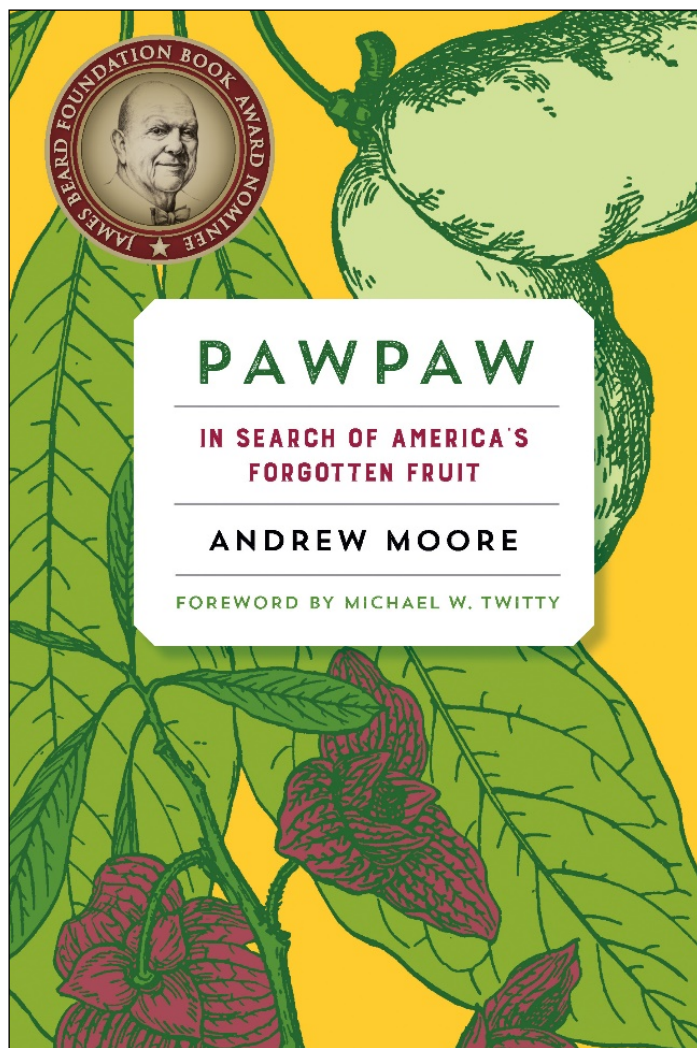
by Andrew Moore

*With permission from the author and publisher, we present the following excerpts from Chapters 1-2 of Andrew Moore's book Pawpaw: In Search of America's Forgotten Fruit (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2017). Mr. Moore grew up in Lake Wales, FL, just south of the pawpaw's native range. A writer and gardener, he now lives in Pittsburgh, PA, where he has been employed as a news editor and a features writer.*

Throughout the years it's gone by a lot of names— frost banana, Indiana banana, fetid-bush, bandango, custard apple, prairie banana, poor man's banana— but most of the time it's just been called pawpaw. At first glance, both the fruit and the tree seem out of place in North America. A cluster of young pawpaws hanging from its branch resembles a miniature hand of bananas. And those clusters are tucked behind the tree's lush foliage, shaded by leaves often a foot in length, larger and broader than those of avocado or mango. Wild pawpaws often appear kidney-shaped, two to six inches long, and one to three inches wide; they typically weigh from just a few ounces to half a pound. But under cultivation— and yes, there are pawpaw breeders and growers— fruits that weigh more than a pound and a half are not uncommon.

American landscapes are filled with berries, plums, persimmons, grapes, and all sorts of other edible fruits. But there is no native fruit as large as pawpaw. To walk into a wild grove is unlike any other American foraging experience. Rock-hard when underripe, the pawpaw eventually turns as delicate and fragile as a raspberry, and only at this stage of extreme vulnerability is it ready to be picked. If unpicked by human hands, ripe fruit will fall to the ground (hence the chorus of the American folk song: "Picking up pawpaws / Put 'em in a basket / Way down yonder in the pawpaw patch") and can then be eaten. Or, if you don't want to wait for them to fall on their own accord, a shake of the tree's trunk will release any fruits that are ready. But you must be gentle: Any unripe fruits shaken down too early will fail to ripen at all. A prematurely picked pawpaw will turn black and rot, yet never sweeten to its potential.

In the Deep South, pawpaws usually begin to ripen in late July or early August; in the mid-Atlantic and Ohio River Valley, early September; and in the fruit's northernmost range, with fruit ripening in mid- to late September, pawpaws can be picked as late as the middle of October. Each tree produces ripe fruit for about thirty days. But, as with everything else in nature, the timetables depend on fluctuations in weather. I've begun to associate pawpaw with goldenrod: when the fields are yellow with the latter's bloom, it's time to check the pawpaw patch.



Courtesy of Chelsea Green Publishing

Pawpaws vary greatly from tree to tree, but even fruit from a single tree will differ in taste considerably depending on its ripeness, the amount of sunlight it receives, and a host of other factors. There is a stage in the ripe fruit's development when its flavor is perfect, but this, of course, is subjective. Regardless, after it's picked, the pawpaw's skin will begin to blacken in just three days, and its sweetness will intensify until caramel is the overwhelming flavor and scent. Alabamian Dale Brooks once told me you can judge a good pawpaw the same way you judge a Cajun gumbo. "If after you eat it and a minute later you start to talk and your lips stick together— that's a good one."

Many old-timers who grew up with the fruit as children would never eat a "green" pawpaw. "If you let them fall off, lay them up on the windowsill, and let them get real black— oh *man*, they're real good!" For them, the only ripe pawpaw is purple-black, shriveled, and incredibly sweet. "My favorite pawpaw is one that's black and starting to ferment just a little bit", another man told me in eastern Kentucky. "It tastes like wine, pawpaw wine." Others, however, prefer a pawpaw just a couple of days after it's picked, when the flesh is still firm and bright, its flavor sweet and mild.

The pawpaw's flavor is most often described as a cross between banana and mango, hence "bandango". But again, they





Courtesy of Chelsea Green Publishing

vary greatly. Wynn Dinnsen, a pawpaw grower in Pittsboro, NC, keeps a log describing the fruits of more than 200 unique trees he has raised from seed, including notes on their weight, seed-to-pulp ratio, and flavor. In the pages of his notebook, slightly stained from pawpaw pulp, he has recorded flavors ranging from melon and pineapple to cotton candy and anise. A “Hoosier lad” once told author Euell Gibbons, “They taste like mixed bananas and pears, and feel like sweet potatoes in your mouth.”<sup>1</sup> Jerry Dedon, a grower in Louisiana, says there are just two basic flavor types: banana or mango. Still others will state plainly, “Pawpaw tastes like pawpaw.”

### What’s a Pawpaw?

Pawpaws are a river fruit. The species, *Asimina triloba*, grows under many conditions and in many climates, but they’re most abundant and reliably found growing in the deep alluvial soil of American bottomlands, along creeks, streams, and great rivers from the mighty Mississippi to the Wabash, Susquehanna, Missouri, and Potomac. In the wild, pawpaw trees grow in the understory, beneath the forest sentinels, the towering oaks, hickories, tulip poplars, and black walnuts. In such company, trees can grow to between 15 and 30 feet tall, but are usually much shorter. The pawpaw is content, has thrived as such for millennia, in the shadows of dark hollows and thick woods. It has never needed to stand out. And so each year as the fruit ripens, most Americans are unaware of the edible abundance in the nearby woods, and the pawpaws fall to become a mash of green and orange, a syrupy sweetness amongst the leaves and twigs, berries and nuts, returning once again to the soil.

The wild pawpaw is also a reluctant fruit tree. Because of its tendency to sucker— to send up sprouts or runners from its roots— the pawpaw often forms colonies, or dense patches of trees. And because it is able to multiply quite successfully in this way, the production of seed-laden fruit is only a secondary measure for ensuring survival. As a result, wild patches of

pawpaw often bear little to no fruit at all. That first patch I stumbled into, with its intoxicating abundance, was not typical. There may be good years when pawpaw patches are loaded with fruit, both on the ground and in the trees, but just as often there is no fruit to be found. There are a few reasons for this. When a single pawpaw tree has been highly successful at sending up suckers, it has surrounded itself with clones; the DNA of every tree in that pawpaw grove will be identical. Typically, for fruit to set, a pawpaw tree needs to cross-pollinate with a tree that is genetically different. The more vigorously a wild pawpaw suckers, the less likely it is to find a successful partner for reproduction. But again, because of its ability to sucker, this reluctance to set fruit doesn’t stop the pawpaw from reproducing. In fact, due to its tenacity some foresters consider the tree a problem, a fierce competitor unwilling to share space in the

understory. “I have been growing pawpaws for seventy-five years, not willingly,” a gardener once wrote, “but because I could not help it. It is claimed there is no way to kill a pawpaw except to transplant it and try to make it grow.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, I was told in Rock Cave, WV, “Around here pawpaw used to grow like goldenrod— just everywhere, like a weed.”

Second, pawpaws aren’t pollinated by bees. Rather, their maroon flowers are visited by carrion flies and beetles— the same insects attracted to decomposing animals and similarly colored and scented flowers. These pollinators are less efficient than bees, however, and their annual presence and performance are highly variable.

Perhaps they’re not as picturesque as the honeybees and bumblebees of other orchards, but the pawpaw does have its own unique love affair with insects. Its leaves are the only larval host for caterpillars of the zebra swallowtail, *Protographium marcellus*. Without pawpaws this large, black-and-white-striped butterfly would not exist.

Each spring pawpaw flowers appear in the forest like bouquets of miniature roses. The small flowers— whose color is thought to approximate flesh, at least to pollinators— are perfect, meaning they have both male and female reproductive units. Because these flowers are pollinated by carrion flies and beetles, some growers have taken to hanging such pungent baits as roadkill and chicken skins in their pawpaw trees. Corwin Davis, the late Michigan plantsman who spent more than 30 years working with pawpaws, reported that placing dead animals in and under his trees at blossom time worked quite well. “The only objection is your neighbors might not enjoy the idea very much”, he wrote.<sup>3</sup> Others have used manure, strategically placed trash cans, and oyster shells; still others, having no need, do nothing at all.

Finally, as an understory tree, pawpaws receive less light than those in the forest canopy. Despite this being the tree’s natural

*continued on next page*

**PAWPAW***continued from page 17*

niche in the ecosystem, the conditions are not optimal for fruit: The less light a pawpaw receives the less fruit it produces. In recent years, growers have taken to planting pawpaws in full sun, which has resulted in more and larger fruit.

### Pawpaws in History

Historically, pawpaws were one of the many fruits Native Americans culled from the forest. To extend the pawpaw harvest, the fruit was often dried and later cooked into stews and sauces. The Iroquois, for example, who called the fruit *hadi'ot*<sup>4</sup>, dried and mixed them in sauces, as well as cooking them into corn cakes<sup>5</sup>. Since corn is low in digestible niacin, Iroquoian cuisine demonstrates a beneficial pairing: pawpaws are incredibly high in this particular nutrient. Other breads, cakes, sauces, and relishes were also made from fresh and dried pawpaws.

“It is surprising to see the great variety of dishes they make out of wild flesh, corn, beans, peas, potatoes, pompions, dried fruits, herbs and roots”, James Adair wrote of the southeastern tribes in 1775. His descriptions are among the most detailed of the few that exist of American Indian foodways from this era. “They can diversify their courses, as much as the English, or perhaps the French cooks: and in either of the ways they dress their food, it is grateful to a wholesome stomach.”<sup>6</sup> Pawpaws were most often dried, treated with lye or ash, and cooked into breads or rehydrated in soups or stews. They were also likely incorporated into drinks, as other pulpy fruits were, pounded and mixed with parched corn flour, creating a smoothie-like beverage.<sup>7</sup>

Today several reports indicate that eating pawpaw fruit leather, or dried pawpaw, leads to brief bouts of illness. Food scientists don't yet know the cause. However, the Iroquois and other Native Americans were able to eat it dried. Perhaps the addition of lye or ash made dried pawpaw palatable, but we don't know for certain, a reminder of the great loss of cultural knowledge that followed conquest by the Europeans.

There remains much to learn about the importance of pawpaws to Native American foodways, but the historic citations are few. The modern map, however, offers some clues. In Louisiana, for instance, the town of Natchitoches translates to “the pawpaw eaters”, and is derived from the place-name given by the Caddo, who called pawpaw *nashitosh*.<sup>8</sup> In Georgia, various places bear the name Alcovy, including Alcovy Mountain, the Alcovy River, and two separate towns. Alcovy is derived from *Ulco-fau*, part of the Creek place-name *Ulco-fau-hatchee*, meaning “pawpaw thicket river”. These examples illustrate that pawpaws were often so abundant, and useful, that places and even people were named for them.<sup>9</sup>

Retired pipefitter Marc Boone, shown below harvesting pawpaws on his property in Ann Arbor, MI, supplies fruits to Zingerman's Creamery for their use in making pawpaw gelato year-round. With several hundred trees, Boone has the largest pawpaw planting in Michigan—a state that marks the northernmost extent of the species' native range— and he heads the Paw Paw Special Interest Group of the Michigan Nut & Fruit Growers Association.



Photo by Andrew Moore

To the earliest European settlers, the fruit was both a curiosity and at times an important food source. At least two founding fathers were interested in pawpaws: Thomas Jefferson sent seeds to contacts in Europe, and George Washington planted them at Mount Vernon. Various species of pawpaw were described in *Bartram's Travels*— written by the famed naturalist William Bartram— accompanied by sketches of leaves, flowers, and fruit. Decades earlier, William's father, botanist John Bartram, was among the first Americans to send pawpaw seeds to Europe, in 1736. John James Audubon painted ripe, yellowing pawpaws and leaves in his portrait of the yellow-billed cuckoo as part of his seminal work, *Birds of America*. And pawpaws have been celebrated in poetic verse— from the works of James Whitcomb Riley and Kentuckian Jesse Stuart, to Walt Whitman. Pawpaws even kept the Lewis and Clark expedition fed— and contentedly so— during a stretch when their provisions were reduced to just one biscuit per man. One of their last journal entries reads, “Our party entirely out of provisions subsisting on poppaws ... [but] the party appear perfectly contented and tell us they can live very well on the pappaws.”

Considering this, I wondered, why didn't the pawpaw become as American as apple pie? Of course, it's not really true that no Americans today are familiar with the pawpaw.

Naturalists, woodsmen, hunters, fishermen, and rare fruit and nut enthusiasts have remained acquainted with it throughout the years, though more so in some regions than in others. And in my conversations with older Americans, from West Virginia and southern Ohio to Arkansas and Missouri, I've been regaled with fond and colorful pawpaw pickin' memories. One woman recalled that, as children, "starting about the middle of August, every kid was expected to walk the creek bottoms coming home from school and pick up pawpaws for dessert." But at some point in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century— as many of the same old-timers have concurred— it appears that pawpaws disappeared from common knowledge.

Although pawpaws were once widely sold at local markets, and regional newspapers even reported on the quality of the wild crop, the fruit was never brought into domestic cultivation. The most common explanation for this has been that pawpaws have too short a shelf life, and are too fragile to meet market demands. And with the rise of a global food system, the ease of shipping tropical fruits— bananas, pineapples, and more recently mangoes and avocados— had diminished the need for the poor man's banana. But as I began my research, I suspected that this wasn't the whole story.

In the few years since I first tasted a pawpaw, the fruit has experienced a modest comeback. Organic gardeners have become interested in it because, unlike so many fruit trees, pawpaws are virtually unaffected by pests and are easily grown organically. Native-plant and butterfly gardeners appreciate the tree both as a larval host and for its important niche in forest ecosystems. And because pawpaws are highly nutritious, they're gaining the interest of health-conscious eaters. Scientists have even shown that certain compounds found within the tree— Annonaceous acetogenins— are among the most potent cancer-fighting substances yet discovered. Still, despite this history and this potential, those in the know remain a distinct minority. ■

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### Pawpaw Ice Cream

*From Appendix 1 of Andrew Moore, Pawpaw: In Search of America's Forgotten Fruit (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2017).*

Vanilla, walnuts, and other flavors and ingredients work well with pawpaw. But if this is your first batch, I would encourage you to try it plain and to let the pawpaw stand on its own. The following is my basic pawpaw ice cream recipe:

- 2 cups pawpaw pulp (or more, if you have it)
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 cups cream
- 2 cups milk

Combine the pawpaw and sugar. Stir in the cream and milk. Pour mixture into an ice cream maker and freeze according to the manufacturer's directions.

### Pawpaw Products and a Pudding Recipe

Fresh fruit, frozen pulp, and other pawpaw products can be purchased online from Earthy Delights (<https://earthy.com>) in Traverse City, MI, and from Integration Acres (<https://integrationacres.com>) in Albany, OH.

In addition to Andrew Moore's recipe for Pawpaw Ice Cream (at left), readers might be interested in a recipe for Pawpaw Pudding with Vanilla Wafer and Sesame Crumble (<https://www.pbs.org/food/recipes/pawpaw-pudding-vanilla-wafer-sesame-crumble>). That recipe was created recently by Southern chef Vivian Howard, owner at The Chef & The Farmer restaurant in Kinston, NC, and star of the related PBS-TV series, "A Chef's Life".

—RKS

# MAYHAW JELLY: A TREASURE OF THE SOUTH

by John G. Ragsdale, Jr.

*This article is reprinted from the South Arkansas Historical Journal (Vol. 1, Fall 2001). John G. Ragsdale, Jr. (1924-2020) was a petroleum engineer who spent most of his career in southern Arkansas. He was best known to food enthusiasts for his books about camp cooking and the history of the Dutch oven; for Repast, he wrote "Dutch Ovens: Classic Cooking Vessels of the Heartland" (Summer 2007). We published an obituary in our Winter 2021 issue.*

Since the mid-1800s mayhaw fruit has been treasured for culinary use in the kitchens of the South. Through the years, the fruit was used in homes for jelly, preserves, and butters. The fruit often has been used for wine.

Before 1940, many local people gathered the berries for sale. Sales were from roadside vendors or in door-to-door vending. Family members welcomed the cash for gathering a local wild product.

## The Mayhaw Tree

The mayhaw tree grows in low, wet areas near lakes, sloughs, or river bottoms. The usual places we travel to for the berries are in these areas. The trees will grow in well-drained, slightly acid soil with a pH of 6-6.5. An article in the May 1989 *National Gardening* magazine indicates the extensive range of native mayhaw trees from North Carolina south and west to south Arkansas and east Texas.

In the past 20 to 30 years, much effort has been made in selecting superior trees, then grafting or rooting trees for sale as orchard stock. This has worked well and many mayhaw enthusiasts today have trees planted to provide the berries.

In the last few years extensive research has been done on mayhaw trees. Seed growth, grafting, fertilization, mechanical harvesting, diseases, and commercial developments have been investigated.

The wild trees reproduce, grow, and fruit under nature's variations. It is fascinating to investigate the blooms in the February to March time, seek the mature fruit in May, and gather the berries. Then the historic preparation of the jelly is the lovely chore to provide for the family and friends.

Mayhaw trees may grow to a height of 25 feet or more and may be about that wide. The tree, undisturbed by adjoining

trees, will usually have a rounded shape. In the early Spring when the tree is in bloom, you can easily detect the tree. As you may travel by boat on a lake or stream, you can see the tell-tale shape of a rounded, blooming mayhaw tree.

In our area of South Arkansas the mayhaw trees will usually bloom from early February to mid-March. The flowers of 5 white petals, sometimes 6, very similar to apple blossoms, bloom before the leaves appear. Blooms can generally survive a freeze of 32° but not much lower. Occasionally, a warm spell of a few days in February will cause the blooms to flourish and a subsequent freeze of a few days later will damage the blooms—a tragedy for the mayhaw jelly maker that year.

The berries usually ripen in early May, hence the name mayhaw for the tree. The berries will be about ½" in diameter, about the size of some cranberries. The color will mimic some apple fruit with a color from yellow to bright red. Mature fruit is usually more red, but the colors of fruit on a tree can vary. The red fruit is fragrant, very tart, and juicy.

## Gathering Mayhaw Berries

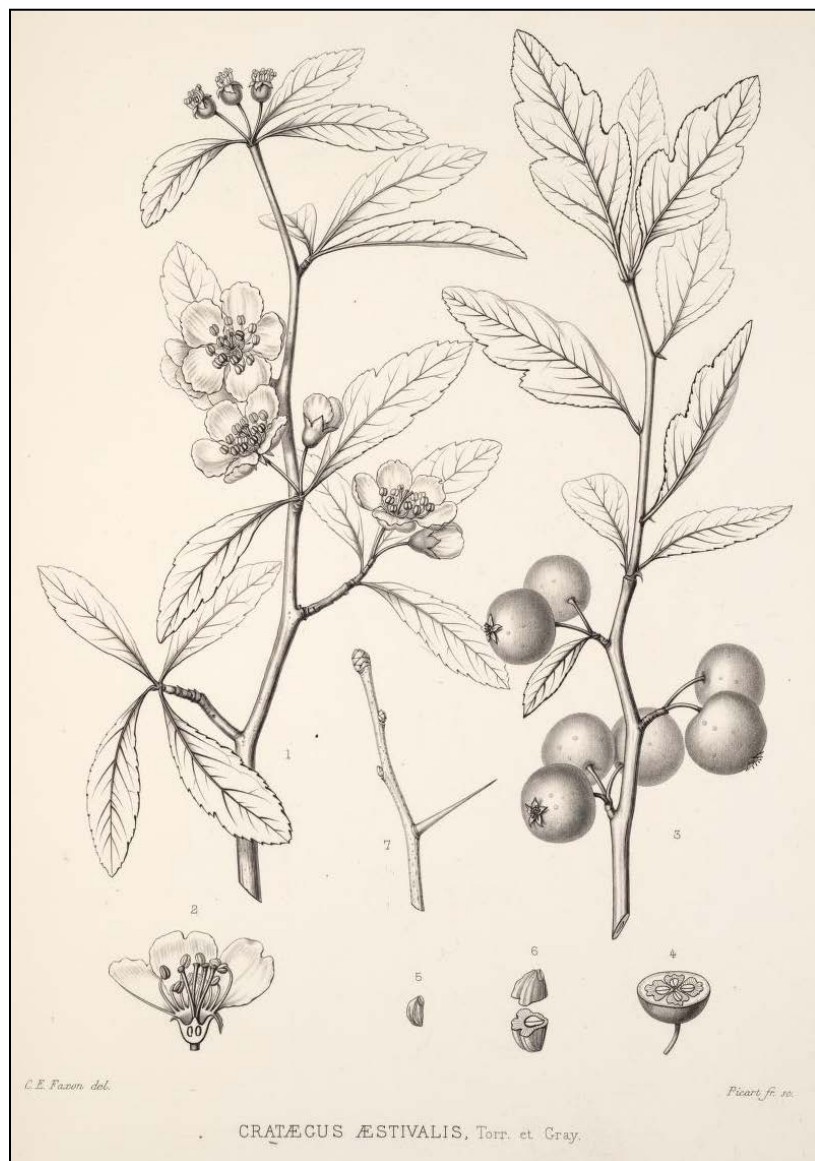
People travel to the location of the wild tree area to gather the berries. A favorite way to gather the berries is to place a light tarpaulin of cloth or plastic sheeting on the ground, under the fruited tree; shake the limbs to cause the ripe or almost ripe fruit to fall on the tarpaulin. Beware the usual fierce, stiff thorns on the limbs of the tree, more numerous on the older wood of the tree. A long-handled tool with a crook on the end will greatly assist in shaking the tree limbs, with minimal scraping damage to the limbs. Sometimes vegetation under the tree will need to be trimmed to avoid puncturing the tarpaulin.

If the mayhaw tree extends over the water surface of a lake or stream, then ripe berries that have fallen will be floating in the water. This can allow you to scoop the berries from the water. This can be done from a boat or by wading in the edge of the water. Some of the berries in the water will be fresh-fallen, and some will have been too long exposed by too many days in the water. The older berries can be discarded. When gathering berries in the water, you can also shake the tree limbs to get the ripe berries to fall.

Another gathering method is to sit on a protective pad or low stool to pick ripe berries from the ground under the tree. This method is very time-sensitive, but you can select only the well-formed berries, avoid twigs and leaves, and have a relatively clean batch of berries. Again, in this method, shake the tree limbs before gathering the berries. Some people prefer this method of gathering because you get a high percentage of ripe, well-formed berries.

## Making Mayhaw Jelly

After the berries are gathered, they need washing and cleaning of any leaves, twigs, or foreign matter. The berries can be stored in a freezer for future use. I would suggest storing the berries in bags of one gallon size. These stored batches later can be removed for cooking.



A botanical illustration of parts of the mayhaw tree, or May hawthorn (*Crataegus aestivalis*).

From Charles Sprague Sargent, ed., *The Silva of North America: A Description of the Trees Which Grow Naturally in North America Exclusive of Mexico*, Vol. 4 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1892), p. CXCII.

closely so that it does not boil over. As the mixture thickens, stir it often. Test the consistency by dipping a spoonful of the mixture and then turning the spoon so that the contents flow back into the pan. When the mixture comes off the spoon in two large viscous drops or else slides off in a thin sheet, it is ready. Remove the pan from the heat, and when the boiling subsides, skim off the foam before you pour the jelly into the sterilized jars.

You will need three utensils: a jar funnel, special tongs to lift the jars from the boiling water, and tongs to lift the flat lids from the very hot water.

Remove a jar from the boiling water and pour the jelly into the jar to  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch from the top. (A canning funnel makes this process more efficient.) Wipe the rim. Place a hot flat lid on the jar; then screw the metal ring on firmly. Continue filling and sealing other jars with the remainder of your batch of jelly.

To make mayhaw jelly, put a gallon of clean mayhaw berries in a large pan (about 8 quarts capacity). Cover the fruit with water to about an inch over the top of the fruit. Do not put a lid on the pan. Bring the water to a boil; then adjust the heat to maintain a low, rolling boil. After about 30 minutes, mash the fruit to salvage as much juice as possible. Continue cooking until you have thoroughly mashed the mayhaws.

Pour the fruit and juice through a cloth bag, collecting the juice in a large container, taking care not to burn yourself. When you can squeeze no more juice from the bag, discard the skins, pulp, and seeds.

When you are ready to cook the jelly, begin the process of sterilizing the jars and lids. Invert the jars on a rack in a large pan of water about three-fourths as deep as the jars are tall. (I prefer half-pint jars.) Bring the water to a boil and keep it at the boiling point while the jelly cooks. Put the flat lids in a small pan; cover the lids with water and bring to a boil. Then lower the heat to just below the boiling point.

To cook the jelly, pour 2 cups of juice and  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of sugar into a 3- or 4-quart saucepan and bring to a boil. Watch it

Place the hot, sealed jars on a flat surface to cool. As the jars cool, the sealing lids will snap shut with the reduced pressure inside the jars. These snapped lids confirm the protective sealing of the jars. When the jars are cool, place labels on them, naming the contents and date.

Although you may be tempted to cook in larger amounts, it is much easier to maintain control of a two-cup batch. The cooled juice can be stored in a freezer until a later cooking time if desired.

Beware of numerous road-side signs for sale of Mayhaw Jelly. The reputation and legend of this wonderful, distinctive jelly flavor have been widely shared. Some people find that more artificial pectin and more water and added color to their batch will provide more jars of jelly for sale. However, in my opinion, these additions weaken the flavor and quality of the jelly. Of course, our jelly made of only berry juice and sugar provides less quantity but high quality of mayhaw jelly.

Try some of this delicious jelly on some home-made hot biscuits, fresh toasted whole wheat bread, or even a batch of hot corn bread. The flavor is excellent! ■

# A SALUTE TO FOUR CHAA FRIENDS

Regretfully, we take note of the passing of four longtime members and friends of CHAA in the Midwest. All four of these colleagues were bursting with good ideas and energy. Over the past few decades, from their respective home bases in Ann Arbor, Detroit, Chicago, and Cleveland, they helped educate and nourish our organization and the broader world of culinary history.

We also extend sympathy to CHAA member Marion Holt, whose husband, **Nick Holt**, 88, passed away in April 2022. Marion, who has been a prominent member of our group since the mid-1980s, moved from Ypsilanti to Ann Arbor in June.



**Margot Murphy Michael** was a leading CHAA member from the 1990s to 2011, including service as President during 2000-01 and as Membership Secretary during 2001-06. She was 97 when she died in Ann Arbor on Jan. 28, 2022.

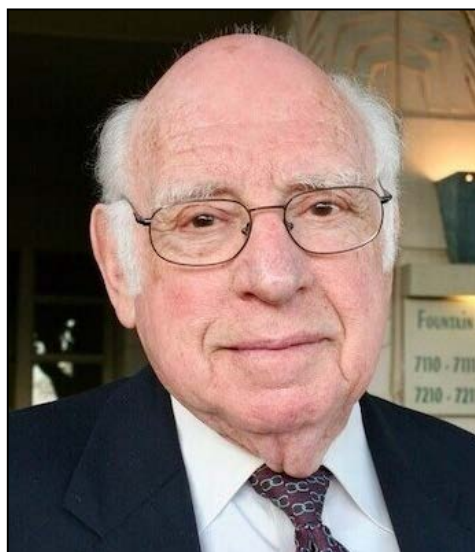
Born in Benton Harbor, MI, and raised in Chicago, Margot led an exceptional and fulfilling life. After her marriage to Don Michael, the couple moved from Connecticut to Washington, DC. There, she raised their son Geoff while gaining practice in her kitchen and starting a weekend program for inner-city children. Her formal cooking experiences began with completing culinary school in France, starting a catering business that Rick Bayless later joined, collaborating

with Bayless on his first TV cooking show, and traveling to Mexico to do research for his first cookbook. In Ann Arbor, she earned a bachelor's degree from the Univ. of Michigan and settled into a charming Queen Anne-style home. For years there, separated from Don, she was proprietor of the Old West Side B & B, cooking wonderful meals and making lasting friendships with many guests.

Later in life Margot became enamored of Italian culture, including its language and cuisine. She spent three months in Spring 1999 living in an apartment in Florence, including a week of instruction in Tuscan cooking at the Cordon Bleu school there. That Fall, she shared her experiences and knowledge in a CHAA talk, "Eating in Florence". For a Foods

of Tuscany theme meal (Jul. 2000), which was also inspired by her stay overseas, she prepared materials to assist the 30 participants in selecting their dishes, and she wowed us with her own contribution, a *tonnato* of poached chicken in a sauce made with tuna, mayonnaise, olive oil, capers, anchovies, and lemon juice. Other favorite Italian dishes that she liked to prepare and teach were *sfogi in saor* (a 14<sup>th</sup>-Century Venetian dish of sole marinated in sweet-sour sauce) and *cappellacci di zucca* (a 16<sup>th</sup>-Century Ferrara dish of butternut squash ravioli featuring homemade pasta noodles, and topped with browned butter and fresh sage leaves).

As a friend stated after learning of her passing, "Margot's elegance touched everything she engaged with." In addition to cooking, her other passions included literature, art, and politics; community service with Food Gatherers, the UM Cancer Center, and others; tennis; fast cars; and *trompe l'oeil* painting and refinishing of furniture. In accord with her wishes, her ashes will be scattered in the Arno River that flows through her beloved Florence.



**Ned Ira Chalut, M.D.**, passed away at age 95 on Feb. 5, 2021 in the Detroit suburbs, where he'd been living in a community for seniors since 2018. He and his wife Joann were among the earliest members of the CHAA after it was founded in 1983. They would drive all the way from

their home in the northern suburb of Grosse Pointe to attend monthly meetings, and they convinced several other Detroit couples to join the fledgling organization as well.

Before long, Ned and Joann were offering their home and garden as venues for some of our Summer theme meals: "Italian *al Fresco* Picnic" (Jul. 1990), "Julia Child's 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Picnic" (Aug. 1992), and "Home Grown: Farmers' Markets" (Aug. 1997). The couple jointly made two presentations to CHAA in the 1990s, and Ned wrote four articles for *Repast*. In "No One Ever Called Her Mali!" (Summer 1996) and "More About Our Food Sources" (Summer 1997), he recollected his grandmother's cooking and food shopping (respectively) in Jewish Detroit. "From Marjolaine to Camel's Hump: Dining Pleasures of Two Gastronomes at Large" (Winter 1999), written jointly with Joann, recounted some of their memorable experiences in restaurant dining around the world, and "Bring on the Schmaltz" (Fall 2001) reported on a local talk by Jack Kugelmass about Jewish restaurants.

Ned and Joann had first come to know Ann Arbor as students at the Univ. of Michigan, where they met. Ned attended UM both for undergraduate studies and for medical training as an otolaryngologist. During his career as a physician and surgeon of national reputation, Dr. Chalot (pronounced sha-LOT) took controversial early stands in favor of providing care in the midst of urban riots, administering treatment to AIDS victims, spreading awareness of domestic violence, and advocating for civil rights and the war on poverty. (This was partly an influence from his father, who had arrived in the city in 1910 as a Jewish refugee escaped from a Russian prison camp, and sometimes took young Ned with him when making house calls as a doctor tending to the inner-city poor.) When Ned retired in 1990, he had accumulated more than 50 years as a physician and as a clinical professor at Wayne State Univ., and was credited for breakthrough research on eardrum transplants.

The Chalats raised three children together. In addition to learning about food history and culture, they pursued gardening, wide-ranging travel, and antiquarian books. In their later years they donated to libraries much of their renowned collection of 10,000 volumes, including many wonderful works for children. (Joann died in early 2015; see obituary in *Repast*, Winter 2015.)

Nettie Kardon. An expert on machinery and lubrication, he worked for outboard motor manufacturers in Illinois and Wisconsin, retiring in 1991 as Vice President of Engineering at Outboard Marine Corp. For several years he was also President of the American Power Boat Assn.

In retirement, Edgar kept active with travel, culinary collecting, baking, barbecuing, a gourmet dinner group, classical music concerts, and sail boating. Scott Warner, longtime CHC President and Program Chair, recalled that “he was an endearing regular at our monthly meetings, where he always asked the most intelligent and meaningful questions of our speakers, and often added his knowledgeable comments. He always stayed to warmly engage with me and the other members.” Edgar often traveled to southeastern Michigan to connect with the Detroit Yacht Club, the CHAA, or other organizations. He ended up donating many menus from his collection to the Janice Bluestein Longone Culinary Archive at the Univ. of Michigan.

Mr. Rose wrote the entry on the pecan for the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America* (2004). He also subscribed to *Repast* and contributed two articles. “The Pecan: America’s Sweet Nut” (Summer 2006) traced the New World nut’s history from its use by Native Americans and European settlers through its commercial production, made possible when the first successful grafting was achieved in 1847 by an African-American gardener enslaved on a Louisiana plantation. Edgar wrote that “the pecan pie is among all pies the most American”; cited the pie’s early history in print starting in 1860s Texas; and gave his own authentic recipe, made with light brown sugar and dark rum (not corn syrup). “The True Origins of Boston Baked Beans” (Spring 2010) argued that that dish and food custom evolved from *cholent*, a traditional Jewish Sabbath dish that Boston merchants might have regularly encountered in Amsterdam.



Sometimes it seemed like everyone in Chicagoland knew **Edgar Rose** of Highland Park, IL— he was a brilliant, generous, and gregarious

fellow, full of wonderful stories. To top it off, his home-baked pecan pies and flourless chocolate cakes were famous! A longtime member of the Culinary Historians of Chicago (CHC), he died at 94 on Dec. 28, 2020.

Edgar was a connoisseur of cuisine from regions all over North America and the world, the result of his lifelong collecting of cookbooks and menus and, more fundamentally, of his lifelong experiences. He was born in Germany in 1926 and, to evade Nazi repression of Jews, he escaped to Czechoslovakia and then, in 1939, to Turkey. After WW2 he settled in the Boston area, where he earned a master’s degree in mechanical engineering at MIT, became a citizen, and married



**Fred Griffith**, a TV news personality who co-authored a series of cookbooks with *his wife* Linda and helped advance the food scene in Cleveland, was surrounded by family when he died in a rest home in suburban Solon, OH, on Jul. 19, 2019. He was 90; Linda, about one

*continued on next page*

## CHAA FRIENDS *continued from page 23*

decade younger than he, survives. Jointly, they delivered four guest lectures to the CHAA in just under eight years—still an all-time record!

Fred grew up in Charleston, WV during the Great Depression and WW2. He was washing dishes in his family's restaurant at age 12, and "slinging hash" at 16. He majored in philosophy at West Virginia Univ., served as an Air Force officer, then worked as a news director on radio and eventually TV. His personality was magnetic, and he set national trends with his morning TV talk show format: he and his fellow hosts engaged in easy banter, and the news desk was eliminated so he and his guests could have direct conversations, which combined folksy charm and intellectual curiosity. Fred also scheduled cooking segments and helped bring Cleveland chefs like Michael Symon to fame. He would retire in 2012 after more than 50 years in the business.

Fred married Linda, his second wife, in 1981, two years after *Cleveland Magazine* named her as one of the 10 best cooks in the city. When she left her job as a hospital fundraiser the couple embarked on a publishing run together. Their first two books were *The Best of the Midwest: Recipes from 32 of America's Finest Restaurants* (1990) and *The New American Farm Cookbook* (1993). In Nov. 1995 they came to Ann Arbor to present "The Broad Spectrum of Onions", a CHAA talk prompted by their James Beard award-winning book, *Onions, Onions, Onions: Delicious Recipes for the World's Favorite Secret Ingredient*. Their Apr. 1997 talk focused on the history of the Dutch oven, following publication of their book *Cooking Under Cover: One Pot Wonders—A Treasury of Soups, Stews, Braises, and Casseroles*.

The Griffiths spoke to CHAA about "Our Passion for the Stinking Rose" (Feb. 2001) in conjunction with *Garlic, Garlic, Garlic: More than 200 Exceptional Recipes for the World's Most Indispensable Ingredient*, and "Let's Go Nuts Together" (Sep. 2003) following *Nuts: Recipes from Around the World That Feature Nature's Perfect Ingredient*. The legwork done for *Nuts* gives a sense of their approach: they visited a 4900-acre pecan grove in Georgia owned by Turkish immigrants, and included a recipe for Circassian chicken made with pounded nuts; in California they hunted down producers of almonds, walnuts, and pistachios; they flew to Italy to visit chestnut growers and the Ferrero hazelnut concern, famous for Nutella®; in Kerala state, India, they toured leading cashew estates and coconut plantations. They also did historical research, tracking down nut uses in places like John Gerard's herbal (1597) and Amelia Simmons's *American Cookery* (1796). ■

## CALAMANSI *continued from page 15*

### The History Held by a Plate of Calamansi

Having grown up in Canada and being of mixed heritage, my tastes are, like me, somewhat in-between. A good phrase for this mix is *Filipinx*, a gender-neutral and inclusive term for people of Filipino descent who now live in or have grown up in North America. When waxing nostalgic, I serve my Filipinx desserts on a plate that belonged to my great-aunts. I cherish the history held by this plate that has travelled thousands of miles.

My grandparents must have eaten from the plate and from the rest of the family china bought during the precarious years of the Second World War, when the Philippines was occupied by Japan. My great-aunts were forced to farm for the Japanese, but they refused to keep the occupation pesos with which they were paid, strong in the belief that liberation was imminent and the pesos would be worthless. There was little to purchase in rural Philippines at the time, and my great-aunts decided to invest in china, something that they thought was beautiful and would bring light to an otherwise dark era.

Although only a teenager at the time, my grandfather had joined the Philippine resistance and was captured by the Japanese. As a prisoner of war, he endured untold hardships, torture, and starvation. After his release from Japanese imprisonment, Lolo made his way from his hometown of Santa Catalina, in the province of Illocus Sur, to Ballesteros. There, he met my grandmother toward the end of the war, and their first child, my mother, was born there shortly after the war ended.

As I was growing up, every time my mother used these china plates, or more often took them out for cleaning, she told me that they would one day be my inheritance from the great-aunts. There is one remaining piece. For me, calamansi, this plate, and my family's story will forever be entwined.

When I started my journey to recreate my childhood foods, I was perplexed. Nothing felt or tasted quite right. However, the more I read, discussed, experimented, and learned, the more I realized that I would never perfectly recreate the dishes my mother and extended family made. I have come to understand that diversity is the beauty of Filipino cuisine. What else can be expected from a nation of over 7000 islands, colonized by two foreign powers (first Spain, then the United States) and heavily influenced by another (China)? It will continue to evolve, although our memories remain.



# REPORT ON CHAA'S WINTER 2022 PROGRAMS



## FOOD IN TIMES OF WAR AND PEACE

If we were cynical, we might say that our monthly programs last Winter and Spring portrayed a Hobbesian world that is “nasty, brutish, and short”— full of drudgery (home economics), butchery (meat processing), and violence (warfare’s hunger for food)!

But on a brighter note, we ended the season by learning about six remarkable women and how their dining habits help tell the stories of their lives and times.

These Sunday afternoon talks were carried online via Zoom, where they drew, on average, audiences of a little more than 100 people. The series is organized by our Program Chair, **Glenda Bullock**, in collaboration with our hosting partner, the Ann Arbor District Library (AADL). Recordings of many of the programs, and details about forthcoming ones, are available on the “Program Schedule” page of the CHAA website (<https://culinaryhistoriansannarbor.org>).

### Home Economics as Reform Movement

In its first century, the goal of home economics was to reform domestic work via science; in the realm of the kitchen, it was focused not on how to make the most delicious dishes, but on how to prepare the most nutritious and thrifty meals efficiently and easily. This we learned on Jan. 16 from a presentation by **Danielle Dreilinger**, “The Secret History of Home Economics”. As part of research for her 2021 book of that title, Ms. Dreilinger interviewed many home economists. She lives in North Carolina and is employed by the Gannett news network as a storytelling reporter.

Home economics was born in the U.S. with Catharine Beecher’s *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841), the first book to argue that women’s housework was not about doing mindless chores but required intelligence, planning, and a scientific approach that should be taught in schools. Other milestones in the history of the movement were investigations by the feminist-minded Ellen Swallow Richards, a chemist at the Lawrence (Mass.) Experiment Station (1884-1911), who popularized the concept of nutritional components and who supervised the Rumford Kitchen exhibit at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair; dietary programs pioneered at Battle Creek Sanitarium in the early 1900s; government food-rationing guidance during the two world wars; “Aunt Sammy’s Radio Recipes” and other educational projects of the USDA’s Bureau of Home Economics under its

chief, Dr. Louise Stanley (1923-43); the teachings of Dr. Flemma Pansy Kittrell, an African-American nutrition professor at Hampton Institute in Virginia (1940-44) and Howard Univ. in Washington, DC (1944-73); and work by Fabiola Cabeza de Baca Gilbert, a bilingual nutritionist for the New Mexico Agricultural Extension Service (1929-59) who also wrote cookbooks championing Hispanic-American foodways.

Ms. Dreilinger also researched the promotional cookbooks produced by home economists and dieticians employed by food and kitchenware companies, industry lobbying groups, department stores, and utilities. Mass campaigns such as the Betty Crocker program at General Mills in Minneapolis, which was led by home economist Marjorie Husted during 1924-50, were guided as much by marketing and ideology as by science and health. “They often did not think that they were pushing domesticity”, said Dreilinger, whose mother was a home economist for General Foods. “In fact, a lot of them thought that they were creating quick convenience dinners so that women could have jobs. But you know they were part of this ‘femininity-industrial’ complex of the 1950s and ’60s, for sure.”

### War and Dietary Change

In contrast to the facile notion that the atom bomb defeated Japan in World War 2, we learned from Ph.D. student **Jing Sun** of Pennsylvania State Univ. that more fundamentally, Japan couldn’t afford the war because of its shortage of farmland, food supplies, and other resources. Ms. Sun was part of a Feb. 20 roundtable discussion among several contributors to the 2021 book *The Provisions of War: Expanding the Boundaries of Food and Conflict, 1840-1990*. The event was moderated by the book’s editor, PSU history professor **Justin Nordstrom**.

The late anthropologist Sidney Mintz once wrote, “War is probably the single most powerful instrument of dietary change in human experience.” The role of food supply during war is only one dimension of that, but it has the power to shape history. Japan— still largely agrarian before WW2 and vulnerable to its reliance on rice imports— had invaded Manchuria in 1931 and sent thousands of farmers there, hoping to turn it into a rice-export powerhouse. Instead the region became a net consumer of rice, Mao Zedong was swept to power in China, and Japan’s defeat ended its colonial adventures. Another panelist, **Leslie Przybylek** (John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh), discussed meat-supply problems in the Allied nations during the war, and how the responses ranged from rationing to black markets. As always in major wars, governments had to balance the dietary needs of their armies and their home populations. Especially given racial and urban/rural disparities, U.S. officials knew that shortages were a potential source of social disunity and even disorder; thus, they redoubled efforts to teach consumers how to stretch their meat purchases and use other protein sources, and they vilified black-market buying. Unfortunately, much of this propaganda portrayed women homemakers as the crux of the problem, instead of ranchers, traders, and profiteers. **Evan Sullivan** (SUNY Adirondack) has probed the poor meal service at U.S. veterans’ hospitals after WW2, and the resulting complaints about food quality and sanitation. The causes included an overreliance on inexperienced male cooks instead of the more capable women dieticians on staff; the poor state of kitchen and

*continued on next page*

## CHAA PROGRAMS *continued from page 25*

conveyance equipment in hospitals and mess halls; and the racial segregation of soldiers.

Food has also figured into uprisings and insurrections, sometimes as the focal point of contention. As we learned from **Karline McLain** (Bucknell Univ.), “It was in India that Mahatma Gandhi began connecting the dots between food and empire.” In 1900-20, Gandhi founded several intentional farming communities in South Africa and India as part of anticolonial struggles for independent rural development. He opposed the consumption of sugar, tea, coffee, and cocoa because they were produced by enslaved or indentured labor primarily for colonial export. With the Dandi March of 1930, he led Indians to fight the British-imposed salt tax via an act of mass nonviolent civil disobedience, rousing popular support for independence from Great Britain. About 50 years later, a Maoist insurrection in Peru similarly aimed to sever that country from the twin grip of imperialist underdevelopment and the Catholic establishment. **Bryce Evans** (Liverpool Hope Univ., England) has studied this Peruvian “people’s war” led by the Shining Path. Their strategy to seize power was essentially to strangle and starve the ruling powers by gradually encircling the cities from armed peasant base areas. Civilians caught in the middle included women who ran self-sustaining people’s kitchens that served simple meals of rice and beans to shantytown dwellers. The neoliberal government wanted to privatize these kitchens, while the guerillas aimed to turn them into bases of struggle. Shining Path accused a key kitchen organizer, Maria Elena Moyano, of “ameliorating the capitalist state”, and she was assassinated in 1992.

“Grow More... Can More... in '44”

By 1944, an estimated 44% of all fresh produce used in U.S. meals was being harvested from “victory gardens”. During WW2, the Allies treated food as a weapon of war deployed on the home front— while Germany had no comparable home-gardening program— said **Judith Sumner** in her Mar. 20 talk, “Victory Gardens: How a Nation of Vegetable Gardeners Helped to Win the War”. Dr. Sumner, an ethnobotanist who lives in Worcester, MA, is the author of *Plants Go to War: A Botanical History of World War II* (2019).

Soon after the U.S. entered the war, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt established what she called “Victory Garden” outside the White House. The name and concept became a nationwide campaign promoted by the USDA, the War Food Administration, and other federal agencies as well as state and local governments, civic organizations, and county agricultural extension offices. Most gardens were sited in homeowners’ backyards (many of them updating “war gardens” that had been maintained since WW1), while others were staked out in urban lots or outside schools and office buildings. Posters, pamphlets, bulletins, and films— directed especially at women and children, and tailored to seasonal and local growing conditions— advertised the program and gave advice about nutrition, crop selection, gardening tools, and the best ways to plant, water, and fertilize the crops, to ward off pests, and to preserve food in the home kitchen or at community “canning bees”. Although the goals were serious, the tone was kept light.

The campaign greatly aided the U.S. war effort. It relieved food shortages faced by families, thereby making more food available to troops and to lend-lease programs; it eased the burden on railroads tasked with shipping war materiel; and it boosted homefront morale. After the war, people were encouraged to continue their plots as “liberty gardens”, but this largely failed as most consumers wanted to get back their leisure time, their grassy lawns, and their meat-and-potato meals. Still, there were some lasting effects: there was wider familiarity with certain plant foods such as tomatoes, small lettuces, soybeans, and winter squashes; fresh vegetable salads rose in popularity; and market demand for seeds and canning equipment grew. Ms. Sumner also surveyed aspects of the corresponding Dig for Victory campaign in wartime Britain, such as the use of cloches and Anderson Shelters to protect plants; the Land Army, a corps of women conscripted for farming; haybox cookery; and heavy reliance on vegetarian meals.

### Straight from the Meatpacking District

It’s the 1940s, and you’re dining at Le Pavillon on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. After you select steak au poivre with a celery braise, the waiter brings you an exquisitely prepared cut of beef sourced from Ottman and Co., one of the most highly regarded firms in the Meatpacking District. This past Apr. 24 **Jacquelyn A. Ottman**, a green-marketing and zero-waste expert who was a fifth-generation participant in her family’s business, presented a talk, “Unpacking the Meatpacking District Legacy of Ottman & Company, New York’s Storied Meat Purveyor”. A copy of her 2022 book, *Ottman & Company: Meatpacking District Pioneers*, was raffled off at the event.

When they began emigrating in 1850, the Ottmanns (spelled thus) were Protestants from a town in southwest Germany, where they had already been involved in butchering. First setting up shop in New York’s Fulton Market, they sold high-quality beef and other meats and poultry, and by the 1870s business was booming. Eventually they relocated to the Meatpacking District which, at its height, boasted nearly 250 meat purveyors. At the time, livestock was brought by railway directly into specially-designated parts of the city and then slaughtered, mostly in underground areas. Much of the meat was then aged at facilities within the district thanks to a unique cooling system that used brine circulated in pipes. Ottman’s customer base extended as far as the Mississippi River and the Caribbean. The firm supplied leading Manhattan restaurants like Luchow’s, 21 Club, The Palm, and Le Pavillon— but also events such as the Bermuda Conference (1943), nearly 800 miles away.

After WW2, Ottman & Co. was an industry leader in taking advantage of new technologies for packaging, freezing, and shipping, such as Cryovac® airtight sealing. As a result, by the 1960s livestock no longer had to be brought by rail; it was butchered out on the range, and the meat was vacuum-packed, boxed, refrigerated, and trucked from the Midwest right to New York. There, the meat was cut and pressed into uniform “portion control” steaks and chops.

In the 1970s, when Jacquie worked as a clerk and bookkeeper at the firm during her teen years, there were 135 employees. Teams from Ottman were consulted by Andre Jaccard in perfecting his mechanical meat tenderizer, and by Du Pont and



Company in perfecting Bivac, a vacuum packaging that thwarts freezer burn. The firm also pioneered the use of “chef-ready meats”, which are pre-cooked roasts packed in their own roasting bags, not needing any highly-trained professionals to prepare them. Based on such innovations, Ottman was able to ship meat products to 27 countries— even hallal-certified beef to royal palaces in Saudi Arabia. In 1985, the company relocated to Sutton, MA, to achieve an economy of scale not possible in crowded Manhattan.

#### Women’s Lives Told Through Their Dining Habits

Every life has a food story— not just an anecdote, but an enduring relationship with eating. **Laura Shapiro** conceived of her most recent book, *What She Ate: Six Remarkable Women and the Food That Tells Their Stories* (2018), based on realizing that ordinary meals give an incomparable vantage point for biography. Food happens to every person, every day, and is entangled with all of the social and economic conditions of the times. Ms. Shapiro, a writer based in New York and a longtime member of the Culinary Historians groups in New York and Boston, spoke to us on May 15 about “*What She Ate* and Why I Wrote About It: Women, Food and Biography”. Five of the six women featured in the book were not professional cooks, because, she said, she wanted to highlight the untypical and the unpredictable. Gathering information was challenging: historically, women’s diaries and correspondence were often not preserved, and only in recent times have discussions of food become common in published memoirs and autobiographies.

The main focus of this talk was writer Dorothy Wordsworth, one of the six women in the book. Dorothy, who never married, was the English romantic poet William Wordsworth’s dear younger sister. She kept a journal in 1799-1802 when the two were living an impoverished but happy life together in the pretty village of Grasmere, in the Lake District. The meals that she prepared for them at Dove Cottage had the immediacy of their surroundings: simple porridges and broths, bread baked in the ov-

en, green peas and scarlet beans and herbs picked from the garden, apples from their orchard, and other foods from their neighbors— Mr. Clarkson’s turkey, someone else’s eggs or mutton chops or bacon or bushels of gooseberries, gingerbread from the blind man down the street, or fresh fish from the lake. But then William got married, and soon the journal broke off.

Decades later, Dorothy was living with William’s oldest son, John, a struggling young curate in a dreary coal-mining town. She was helping him write his sermons and was again keeping a diary, but now there was little to write about food: John’s cook-servant ruled the kitchen, and he wasn’t very good at it. Dorothy did record trying some of the black pudding that he served one Winter day in 1828. A food of rural commoners that she’d likely never had before, it’s made with pig’s blood, fat, oats, and herbs, encased in the pig’s intestine and boiled like a sausage. It is heavy and hard to digest— and Dorothy had struggled most of her life with indigestion, likely colitis or IBS. Shapiro believes that she tolerated such a diet because she was grateful to again be living with, and useful to, someone. As her dyspeptic attacks became routine, Dorothy resorted to frequent use of laudanum. For the last two decades of her life she willed herself to eat generously, taking on weight to the point of obesity.

The other women profiled in Shapiro’s book are Rosa Lewis, a very successful caterer in Edwardian England; Eleanor Roosevelt, whose choices of food (and of White House cook/housekeeper, Henrietta Nesbitt) were often reviled, although they became much more appealing after Franklin died and she left Washington; Eva Braun, Adolph Hitler’s mistress with a stereotypically feminine persona, who objected only to his vegetarianism; Barbara Pym, the witty British novelist of the 1950s who sharply observed dining habits because she saw food as a key to character; and Helen Gurley Brown, longtime Editor of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, whom Shapiro called “a walking war zone of culinary conflict” because she was passionately devoted to food and eating, yet was also an evangelist of dieting and the slender figure. ■

# CHAA CALENDAR

(Unless otherwise noted, programs are scheduled for 4:00-6:00 p.m. Eastern Time.  
For the latest updates, check the CHAA homepage at <http://culinaryhistoriansann Arbor.org>.)

Sunday, September 18, 2022

Micheline Maynard (author of *Satisfaction Guaranteed: How Zingerman's Built a Corner Deli into a Global Food Community*),  
"Forty Years of Zingerman's and Its Impact on the Global Food World".  
Downtown Ann Arbor District Library  
(343 S. Fifth Ave.) and streamed live on YouTube.

Sunday, October 16, 2022

TBA.

Sunday, November 13, 2022

Renee Tadey (author of *Detroit Tiki: A History of Polynesian Palaces & Tropical Cocktails*),  
A nostalgic look at some famous mid-century Detroit Tiki restaurants.  
Online-only via Zoom.

Sunday, December 11, 2022

4-7 p.m., Ladies' Literary Club of Ypsilanti  
(218 N. Washington St., Ypsilanti),  
"The Bonnie British Isles", a participatory theme meal for members and guests of CHAA.

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

- Fall 2022: Fruits of the World and How to Use Them (Part 2)
- Winter 2023: Foods of the Ancient Roman World.

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*First Class*