

Early Sephardic Foodways in the Hudson Valley

By Judith Hausman

IN 1654, 23 Sephardic Jews arrived in the port of New Amsterdam from Recife, Brazil. These wandering Jews had been pirated, almost shipwrecked, and eventually were sued by the ship's captain for the cost of their passage. Although they actually had been heading back to Holland, they represented the first Jews to arrive on American soil.

New Amsterdam Jews had names such as Pinto, da Silva and Meixotto. They followed Iberian customs and eventually would be connected, often by marriage, to other American Jewish communi-

ties in Philadelphia, Newport, and Charleston. There were approximately 2,000 Jews in the colonies by the Revolution; New York had the largest population.

Today's American Jews are overwhelmingly Ashkenazi, of German or Eastern European descent, who immigrated here mainly during the nineteenth century. In Colonial times, however, Sephardic Jews, originally from Spain and Portugal, predominated (Sephardim is derived from Sepharad, the Hebrew word for Spain). Sephardic Jews have existed in what is now Spain for at least 2,000 years. The history of reli-

gious tolerance there is spotty, to say the least, but from the eighth through eleventh centuries—the “Golden Age” in Muslim-ruled Spain—Jews and Muslims shared a highly advanced intellectual, spiritual and political society, and the Sephardim absorbed many aspects of Islamic culture, including the cuisine.

By the mid-thirteenth century, however, Christian rule in Spain outlawed Judaism and because of the Inquisition, many Sephardim became Marranos, or New Christians (hidden or “crypto” Jews), who were forced to practice their religion secretly. Eventually, as many as 100,000 Jews were expelled from Spain during a four-month period in 1492 (an event commemorated on the Jewish holiday Tisha B'Av); many of them settled in North Africa, Turkey, Greece, and the Middle East. Some went to Portugal (which also outlawed Judaism in 1497) and from there to Holland, where they were allowed to practice Judaism openly.

Dutch colonialism throughout much of the New World meant religious freedom for the Sephardim, as it did for other religious sects. But when Brazil and other Latin American colonies were wrested from the Dutch by Portugal, yet another diaspora or dispersal of



The Gomez Mill House in Marlboro, N.Y., is the oldest surviving Jewish homestead in North America.

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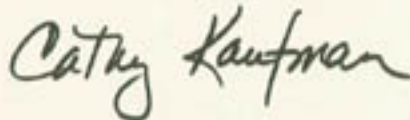
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Papers demonstrating serious culinary history research will be considered for inclusion in issues of the CHNY newsletters. Please contact Helen Brody, newsletter editor. Matriculating students of culinary history or related topics are invited to contribute.

FROM THE CHAIR

THESE are wonderful times for culinary historians and all those fascinated by the history and cultural diversity of how we meet our basic need for food. Whether through the burgeoning academic programs offered at schools and universities, organizations such as Slow Food, or even popular television programming and cookery literature, we are in the midst of an explosion of interest in exploring cuisine thoughtfully and intelligently.

As the new chair of the Culinary Historians of New York (as well as professional chef, cooking teacher, and writer), I am thrilled to be a part of this process. With our wonderful Program Committee chaired by Linda Pelaccio and the other members of the CHNY Steering Committee (see below), we look forward to providing stimulating and provocative programs. We also plan to launch a web site this year, offering programming announcements and other information. Most importantly, I invite you to contact me (ckcuisine@att.net) with any specific concerns or desires about the organization so that we may best serve the membership's interests.



CHNY's New Officers

Cathy Kaufman, Chair
Professional chef and culinary historian. She is on the faculty of The Institute of Culinary Education (formerly Peter Kump's) where she

teaches classes in historical and French cookery. Cathy is also an associate editor for the *Oxford Historical Encyclopedia of American Food and Drink*, to be published by Oxford University Press in 2004.

Stephen Schmidt, Vice-Chair
Food writer and cooking teacher, author of *Master Recipes* and a soon-to-be-published cookbook on American desserts; incumbent vice-chair.

Diane Klages, Treasurer
Administrative assistant to top executives of major corporations, cookbook collector, and an avocational cook with special interest in the foods of Provence and Tuscany.

Kara Newman, Secretary
Freelance editor and writer, currently working for egullet.com, an international website devoted to food.

Stacey Harwood, Member-at-Large/Membership
Policy analyst for the State of New York and a freelance writer with articles appearing in *The Villager* and other local publications.

Linda Pelaccio, Member-at-Large/Programs
Formerly a producer at the Food Network, a food writer, and culinary media coach.

Kathy Cardlin, Member-at-Large/Public Relations
Wine consultant, wine distributor, and longtime member.

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sent the Jews to the Dutch colonies of the Caribbean, and eventually to what is now New York. Those who stayed in Central or South America under Portuguese or Spanish rule were again forced to practice in secret—some of their descendants still can be found in the American Southwest.

Though settlement in the New World meant religious freedom, it presented its own difficulties. Agriculture, trade, milling, and food-preserving systems had to be established from scratch. Jewish colonials had the further challenge of maintaining *kasrut*, or kosher dietary laws.

"For the most part," though, "Jews during the Colonial period cooked and ate like everyone else," explains Joan Nathan in her well-researched *Jewish Cooking in America*. "They learned to use corn, beans, and the abundant halibut, cod, shad, herring and salmon. Their diet was seasonal: fresh food in the summer, dried and preserved fruits and vegetables in the winter, pickled vegetables in the late summer and fall," Nathan continues.

Luis Moses Gomez, an ancestor of U. S. Supreme Court Justice Benjamin Cardozo, arrived in 1695, 41 years after the first Sephardim arrived. After establishing successful agricultural holdings, especially in wheat, in Westchester, N.Y., Gomez set up a trading post near Newburgh in 1714. Though he traded in furs, iron, and glass, his descendants imported silk and Portuguese wine, eventually buying the land in Manhattan that would become the location for the oldest Jewish congregation in America. (The Spanish and Portuguese synagogue

Sheareth Israel is still active today.) Gomez's trading post, just off Route 9W in Marlboro, north of Newburgh, is open to the public as the Gomez Mill House Historic Site—the "oldest surviving Jewish homestead in America." The building has undergone generations of alterations and additions and few of the Gomez family's earliest possessions survive, but the hand-hewn beams, open hearth and pot hooks still suggest the life led there. Perhaps a *chamim*—a simple Sephardic stew of beans, garlic, meat, and bones—bubbled in an iron pot resting on a tripod in the embers. Because observant Jewish women could not cook on the Sabbath, the stew was begun on Friday before sundown and kept simmering for the midday Sabbath meal on Saturday.

Sephardic colonists may have made chamim much like the one included in a nineteenth-century Gomez family cookbook. Chamim, known to Ashkenazic Jews as *cholent*, may in fact have been an antecedent of the popular Boston baked beans.

Because of the long interaction with Muslim culture in Spain, Sephardic and Arabic cuisine have much in common. In their new home, Jewish colonists would have replaced Middle Eastern and Mediterranean elements, using native kidney beans for Iberian fava beans or chickpeas.

The Sephardic influence on early American cuisine is evident in some surprising places. Almonds were pounded into marzipan to produce sweets. Hannah Glasse, in her *Art of Cookery* (1796), included "a marmalade of eggs the Jews' way." Flourless tortes with ground almonds and orange flower water also represent an Arab-Iberian in-

fluence (the recipe allowed Jewish cooks to avoid using wheat flour during Passover). Jewish merchants also might have made Passover macaroons from pistachios, again recalling Spanish-Arabic flavors. Rum and shrub (a combination of rum, lemon rind, and sugar), a popular drink during the Revolutionary period, was based on an Arabic preserving technique taught to medieval Jews.

Both raisins and almonds might have been combined to produce a Sephardic-style Colonial *haroset*, rolled into balls. This sweet paste, used at the Passover seder, often is made from apples and walnuts for the Ashkenazic seder table. It represents the sweetness of life as well as the mortar the Jews had to mix to build the pyramids in Egypt.

Iberian-style recipes often were preserved or adapted by Sephardim because of their association with holiday ritual. Kosher wine, essential for the Passover seder, might have been made from raisins, as observant Jews had been making it since the eighth century. (No grain yeasts could be added because of the prohibition against leavening of any kind during Passover.) Because wine is so important in Jewish holiday ritual, southern Jews later were among the first grape growers and wine importers in the United States.

Kosher butchering was essential to the community, and most Jewish men in the Hudson River Valley learned to butcher according to Jewish dietary laws—otherwise there would have been no meat to eat. Jewish ritual slaughter helped establish the Hays family (formerly the Haas family, from Amsterdam). Six Dutch

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brothers (probably Ashkenazi) emigrated from Holland in the early eighteenth century; Jacob Hays bought 40 acres of land in White Plains and became the ritual butcher for the fledgling community there.

Jacob's second son, David, moved to Bedford in the 1760s to accommodate his growing family (some of his descendants still live there). Dealing in kosher meat led to trading, and David opened a general store and eventually a tavern. He purchased butter, corn, wheat, rye, fruit, and flax, as well as locally produced vinegar and gin to be traded for salt, sugar, tea, molasses, pepper, rum, and chocolate.

Because record-keeping in the Jewish community had greatly improved by this time, the Hays family's marriage contracts, circumcisions, and account books, and even litigation and correspondence about the Jewish holidays survive. Although the family kept two sets of pans to separate milk and meat, and perhaps a third set for Passover, as is the kosher custom, records also show they traded in pork and bacon as part of the usual Colonial commodities.

By the time *The Jewish Manual*, the first Jewish cookbook in English, was published anonymously in 1846 in England, and Esther Jacobs Levy's *Jewish Cookery Book* appeared in America in 1871, the Ashkenazi-influenced foods most often associated with contemporary Jewish cuisine were well established in the community. *The Jewish Manual* contains recipes for sauerbraten-style meat with caraway (for cholent and *kugel*), though much earlier, Jewish pickled herring and smoked fish were familiar

commodities in the Early American Hudson Valley. Hannah Glasse refers to *escabeche*, a spiced and pickled preparation, as "the Jews' way of preserving salmon and all sorts of fish." Shad from the Hudson would have been potted in this Iberian (originally Middle Eastern) fashion, which survives intact today in Caribbean cuisine and as ceviche in Latin America.

Most of the original Sephardic Jewish "pilgrim" line has disappeared into history. However, a few cultural and culinary links clearly persist in the Hudson Valley and beyond. The settlement of the valley and the rest of the New World spread their influence beyond their wildest dreams, and evidence continues to reappear in apparently unrelated corners.



The Gomez Mill House is as much a testament to the multicultural history of the Hudson Valley as it is "the oldest surviving Jewish homestead in North America." For the nearly 300 years since Luis Moses Gomez built his fieldstone trading post, the site has served as home to owners and occupants who made significant contributions to American culture, among them Wolfert Acker, patriot of the Revolution; writer and farmer William Henry Armstrong; artisan Dard Hunter, who resurrected and popularized the art of handmade paper; and preservationist Mildred Starin. The house stands as one of the oldest continuously occupied residences in North America.

In 1979 the house was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Today it is a public museum operated by a private foundation to educate the public

about the contributions of the former occupants. The 28-acre property consists of the six-room house, the mill, ice house, root cellar, and visitors' center.

The house is open April through October, Wednesday through Sunday, with guided tours at 10 and 11:30 A.M., and 1 and 2:30 P.M. Admission is \$5 for adults, \$3.50 seniors, and \$2 students.

Gomez Mill House
11 Mill House Rd., Marlboro, N.Y.
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www.gomez.org

Judith Hausman is the restaurant critic for The Journal News, (Gannett Suburban Newspapers) based in White Plains, N.Y. Her features also appear regularly in Westchester Magazine and The Valley Table. She lives in Northern Westchester with her two children. In addition to culinary journalism, she has a parallel career in teacher training.

This article is adapted from one that appeared in *The Valley Table*, issue 17 (September–November 2002).



The Gomez mill

CULINARY BOOKSHELF

*At Grandmother's Table:
Women Write about Food,
Life, and the Enduring Bond
between Grandmothers and
Granddaughters*

Ellen Perry Berkeley, ed., (2000:
Fairview Press, Minneapolis)

REVIEW BY BETTY FUSSELL

DON'T be seduced by the cozy title into thinking this will be a trip over the river and through the woods to nostalgia land. Remarkably, the 68 women contributors to this volume of miniature portraits in words, photos, and recipes have plucked from the realities of a century and a half of American history real women whose real lives might have been penned by Gertrude Stein in *The Making of Americans*.

The iteration of grandmother names tells the story: Nana, Gran, Nona, Grammy, Babi, Oma, Gramma, Seese, Babci, Mama Willis, Nona, Muju. They came from Lithuania, Greece, England, Russia, Germany, Scotland, Japan, Finland, Lebanon, Ireland, Africa. They were Europeans, Asians, Africans, and Mexicans; Jews, Protestants and Catholics. Some were born here before the Civil War, others immigrated or were born to immigrant parents in the decades between that war and World War I. Most made their way in an America that was still rural; some pioneered West; others landed in big cities. A few were rich; most were poor. Many were widowed young; many were married to difficult men; many suffered hardship

all their lives. Some were fierce and severe; others warm and merry. All of them valued education, hard work, and family bonds, whether they worked for charity as Lady Bountifuls or worked as menials in a Ladies' Lounge.

The book both records and celebrates the diversity of ethnic and class differences and celebrates the continuity of generations during a period of radical social change that redefined what a woman is and what America is. The volume begins with a woman born in 1844 and ends with one born in 1919. The time span covers so many changes in America's idea of itself as a nation—changes which are reflected in the kitchen, in women's work, and in women's dreams and expectations. Wisely, in focusing on the bonds between generations of women, the editor has skipped mothers for grandmothers, where love, freed of the anxieties of daily responsibility, flows more easily and where changes are revealed more dramatically. Nothing is more poignant than the photos of these grandmothers in their youth and maidenhood, in high collar and high seriousness, before tooth-filled smiles became obligatory.

Skipping a generation also intensifies the mystery of identity even within families. One granddaughter writes of her Southern gentlewoman grandmother who was a ship's agent and headed a stevedoring company in Pensacola, Florida: "I have spent many years trying to understand my grandmother, and I know that I will

never quite get there... I want to know more than I learned in the eighteen years we walked the same earth." Many of the granddaughters regret that they didn't ask more, or that their grandmothers didn't tell them more. Grandmothers who were full of stories were a far better window into the extended past than mothers could be.

Grandmothers' recipes, whether they had cooks or cooked themselves, furnished a similar window into the matrix of daily lives and cultures far beyond the present, far beyond the seas. Especially telling are recipes recorded with the original voice intact. One granddaughter was lucky enough to receive recipes embedded in letters, such as this one for bean soup, in which her grandmother writes that she asked her daughter Florence to buy a pound of navy beans. "You'll never guess what I did with them! I counted them! Can you guess how many navy beans are in half a pound? I counted one thousand and twenty-five beans but didn't win a prize. I did get to look them over pretty carefully before I washed them. I took some onions out of the basket where we keep them in the dark, taking the ones about to give birth (one was about to have twins!)." And she proceeds to tell what to do with them. There is nothing individual in the ingredients or the methods but there certainly is in the telling. This could never be a generic soup because it is Mary Suldane Candice's (1887–1982) Bean Soup.

Included are just one or two recipes for each grandmother, usually very simple and classic, and meant to be made in our own kitchens. But the power of the recipes lies in the context of the

individuals, the life stories of the women who have prepared them in the past. Gramma Bella's Sweet and Sour Stuffed Cabbage illustrates the story of Bella from Minsk, who "stored food on her body" from fear of hunger. "Her attentions focused on eating, bathing, shopping, cleaning, and bossing people around," writes her granddaughter Joan Lederman. To make this stuffed cabbage is to remember her Gramma Bella.

The real power of the book lies in the fact that the grandmothers, their stories, and their recipes have been evoked by granddaughters who are themselves skilled writers, most of them professionally so. Their biographies at the end of the book are as revealing as those of their ancestors and perhaps tell us most about the legacy their grandmothers gave them. Anyone tempted to doubt the historical truth of America as a land of opportunity need only connect the stories of the grandmothers with those of their granddaughters. The proof, as always, is in the pudding.

Betty Fussell is a food historian best known for her Story of Corn. Her most recent book, a memoir titled My Kitchen Wars, was adapted a couple of years ago as a one-woman show produced and performed in Hollywood by Dorothy Lyman. Lyman is opening the show Off-Broadway on March 5 at the 78th Street Theater in Manhattan. The show features Lyman's transformation of a live lobster into lobster bisque to the musical accompaniment of live blues singer Melissa Sweeney.

PROGRAM SUMMARIES

HISTORY AND MYSTERY OF MADEIRA

Presented by Nancy Peach

An aperitif of lightly chilled Rainwater Madeira greeted forty-five culinary historians and guests who had weathered a stormy March

night to better understand the mysteries of Madeira. The aperitif was accompanied by ham glazed with Madeira sauce, salted almonds and a Madeira Prune Pecan Cake.

Lecturer and CHNY member Nancy Peach spoke with expertise gained during her 12 years as a

Madeira Prune-Pecan Cake

18-20 pitted prunes, quartered and soaked in ½ cup Madeira
 Dry breadcrumbs for dusting
 1½ cups sifted all-purpose flour
 ½ teaspoon baking soda
 ¼ teaspoon salt
 1½ teaspoons nutmeg
 Finely grated rind of 1 lemon
 1½ tablespoons lemon juice
 ¼ pound (½ cup) butter
 1½ cups sugar
 2 eggs
 ½ cup buttermilk
 ½ pound (2½ cups) pecans, broken into large pieces

Soak prunes overnight or until most of the Madeira has been absorbed. Adjust rack one-third up from the bottom of the oven. Preheat oven to 400 F. degrees. Butter a 9 x 3½-inch tube pan and line the bottom with paper. Butter the paper. Dust all over lightly with fine, dry breadcrumbs. Sift together flour, baking soda, salt, and nutmeg. Set aside. Mix lemon rind and juice and set aside. In a bowl, cream butter. Add sugar and beat well. Add eggs one at a time. Beat for 2 to 3 minutes. On lowest speed add about half of the dry ingredients, all of the buttermilk, then the rest of the dry ingredients, scraping the bowl as necessary with a rubber spatula and beating only until smooth after each addition. Stir in lemon rind and juice, then prunes and nuts. Turn batter into the prepared pan. Rotate pan briskly to level batter. Bake 1 hour or until cake tester comes out dry and top springs back when

lightly touched. Remove from oven and cool in pan on a rack for about 20 minutes. Cover with a rack and invert. Remove pan and paper. Cooled cake may be covered with confectioners' sugar through a fine strainer.

(Submitted by Bill Ciampa)

Ham and Madeira Sauce

½ cured ham—no bone
 1 bottle Madeira Rainwater
 6 cloves
 10 peppercorns
 ½ teaspoon marjoram
 1½ teaspoons cinnamon
 2 tablespoons olive oil
 1 large onion, sliced
 2 medium tomatoes, peeled, seeded and sliced
 2 white turnips or large carrots (I used both), sliced
 1 apple, peeled, cored, and sliced
 ½ cup pitted green and black olives

Marinate ham in the Madeira with the cloves, peppercorns, marjoram, and cinnamon for about two hours, turning once. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spread olive oil in bottom of roasting pan. Arrange sliced onion, tomatoes, turnips and/or carrots, apples, and olives in the pan. Drain marinade from ham and pour over vegetables. Bake for one hour, uncovered. Add ham. You may sprinkle with additional pepper. Cover and continue baking for 50 minutes.

(Submitted by Kathy Cardlin as adapted from *The Horizon Cookbook and Illustrated History of Eating and Drinking through the Ages.*)

representative of the Premium Ports and Madeira Co. and from her frequent visits to the island of Madiera. A tasting included six extraordinary wines provided by Broadbent Selections. They were a Rainwater, a 1995 Colheita Terrentez, a 10-year-old Malmsey, a 10-year-old Bual, and a 1964 Bual. The last wine was a 10-year-old Cossart-Gordon Malmsey from Nancy's own cellar.

Madeira, a possession of Portugal about 600 miles off the Atlantic coast of Morocco, was "discovered" in the fourteenth century. It became an important provisioning port, used by merchant ships and early explorers including Christopher Columbus. Wine production began there in the sixteenth century. Madeira, a fortified wine, was created by accident. Cargo ships, carrying still wines from the island to the American colonies, followed the southern trade winds route that brought them close to the equator and exposed the wine to extremely hot temperatures that "cooked" them. Surprisingly, American customers liked the taste. Later, fortification became part of the process, probably to further stabilize the wine for the ocean voyage. Fortification is the addition of neutral grape brandy, which raises the alcohol level to about 20 percent. In addition to Madeira, port and sherry are the most famous examples of fortified wines. The heating process is now accomplished under controlled conditions, either in specially built *estufas* (ovens) or with the natural heat of attics in Madeira's wine warehouses. Heat causes sugar in the wine to caramelize. This gives Madeira its unique "burnt tang,"

and is the key to its indestructibility. Oxidization from exposure to heat ruins still wine, but this intentional oxidizing of Madeira makes it invulnerable to further oxidation. Madeira is the longest lived of all wines. For a price it is still possible to buy vintage Madeiras from the late 1700s that are sound.

Grape varieties used for Madeira are virtually unknown outside Portugal. Terrentez, Bual, and Malmsey, all included in the tasting, along with Verdelho and Sercial are the five native varieties used in the best Madeiras. Tinta Negra Mole, the island's most widely planted grape, is used to make the better known "Rainwater" style. Sadly, today few Americans appreciate these great Madeiras, and do not realize that they bear no resemblance to the inexpensive products sold for cooking.

Thanks to Broadbent Selections for its generous contribution of wine and Bill Ciampa and Kathy Cardlin for the delicious food.

—LINDA LAWRY

Linda Lawry is the director of the International Wine Center in New York City.

THE HISTORY OF CITRUS

Presented by Pierre Laszlo

In early April, Pierre Laszlo, retired chemistry professor and prolific author, traced the journey of citrus from its birth in Asia, through its introduction to Europe by Alexander the Great, and its eventual introduction to the New World by the Spanish (to Florida) and the Portuguese (to Brazil).

On arrival we were handed a plate of the Brazilian national food, *feijoada*, and a glass of the Brazilian

national drink, *Caipirinha*, followed by fabulously rich orange mousse made by our host Linda Pelaccio from one of Pierre's recipes. All dishes, of course, contained citrus.

Our guest pointed out that citron seeds found in Mesopotamia have been dated back to 4000 BC. He continued that it was the Arabs who brought the orange to Spain, but the Jews were also responsible for the spread of citrus. Citrus is used in the Jewish harvest festival, Succoth. As Jews were persecuted and emigrated to foreign lands, they brought citrus with them. In fact, many of the first Europeans to settle in Brazil were Jews.

Pierre mentioned other influences on the food of Brazil. In 1538 millions of slaves from Africa began to be imported to Brazil for cheap labor. They, too, adopted local ingredients. *Feijoada*, a stew of pork, beans, rice, and greens, often garnished with orange, is a result of the mix of Portuguese, African, and Amer-Indian cuisines. Years later Swiss immigrated and created a drink called "Limonada Suissa" resulting in citrus juice taking on the symbolism of Swiss industriousness and cleanliness.

Supporting the premise that citrus can also be a recipe for wealth, Pierre cited José Cutrale, an orange dealer in Brazil, who in 1962 after a frost in Florida killed the local orange crop, made a deal with Minute Maid to make up the shortfall. It was the beginning of a relationship that made José Cutrale millions.

The talk ended with a description of *Caipirinha*, the drink we were greeted with, as being "addictive, sneaky, and delicious".

—JOHN JENKINS

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FOOD HISTORY VERSUS
CULINARY HISTORY

Presented by Barbara Haber

At the tip of Manhattan in the heart of old New York, on the third floor of Fraunces Tavern Museum, Barbara Haber, former Curator of Books for Schlesinger Library at Harvard University's Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, spoke to members on a cool September evening.

But first, the group satisfied their hunger and thirst with hors d'oeuvres and wine, and toured the building where George Washington bade farewell to his troops before resigning his commission in 1783. Then Chair Phyllis Isaacson presented the slate of 2003–2004 officers which was voted on and elected (see page 2).

Barbara began her talk by saying that when she first came to the Schlesinger Library, prior to the merger of Radcliffe and Harvard, it was a library devoted to the history of women. The collection focused on women's work in the political realm, and contained information about women's involvement in such areas as unions and the Temperance movement. There was little information about what women cooked because homemaking was, to the academically minded, trivial. If there was any interest in food at all, it was as an element of immigration history, the history of science and technology, or the impact of specific foods upon a culture or society.

Barbara, considering herself a culinary historian as opposed to the more narrowly focused food historian, felt that the study of various foods and how they were prepared would shine a new light on the culture of a particular time

and in a particular place. She began by adding cookbooks, journals, letters, historical menus, and other public documents to the Schlesinger collection. Slowly the "academics" came around. She cited *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1985) by anthropologist Sidney Mintz as a step in the direction of the study of culinary history. Others whose culinary history works she admires are Sophie Coe, who illuminated pre-Columbian civilizations with her book *America's First Cuisines* (1994); William Woys Weaver, with his studies of Pennsylvania-Dutch cooking and Pennsylvania-German foods; and the Colonial and Early American histories by Karen Hess.

Barbara cheered the recent trend of academics to the study of culinary history, noting significant events such as the gathering in England of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, organized by Alan Davidson; the arrival of culinary history organizations such as ours that have sprung up across our nation; the creation of period meals as a hands-on way of understanding the past.

At the end of her talk, Barbara fantasized about how to frame a serious course of food studies. Ideally, she said, it should combine the scholarly rigor of the academics with the subjects that interest the culinary historians.

—JOHN JENKINS

John Jenkins is currently on a tour of Spain including two weeks in northern Spain with Penelope Casas. He has recently retired from the Food Network where he was the network research librarian.

MEMBER PROFILE

MATT LEE

By Kara Newman



Within the next year, Matt and brother Ted will be celebrating the 10th anniversary of their successful mail-order catalogue of southern foods, "The Lee Bros. Boiled Peanuts Catalogue," and the publication of their first cookbook, *The Lee Bros. Boiled Peanuts Cookbook* (W.W. Norton & Company). The brothers also are contributing editors at *Travel & Leisure* magazine, and write frequently for *The New York Times*.

CHNY member and South Carolina native, Matt attended Harvard University and graduated magna cum laude as an art history major. After working in the press office of the 1992 Clinton-Gore campaign in Little Rock, Arkansas, he moved to New York City and interviewed at Sotheby's and Christie's without much success.

"I decided in my depressed state, to make boiled peanuts a popular New York City bar snack." With a recent influx of southern-style bars and restaurants into the city, the timing seemed right to him. "I thought this was a good idea because in Charleston, although they are not a bar food, boiled peanuts are a very popular, universally known, and understood snack. They are a regional delicacy."

The first challenge was to find raw peanuts, which he tracked

down at the Hunt's Point Market in the Bronx. After boiling the raw peanuts in the bathtub of his Ludlow Street apartment, he hit the streets.

Sales success was hard to come by at first. "Most bars and restaurant owners who were not Southern had no interest in bringing into their establishments wet, slimy, drippy, boiled peanuts," he recalls. Restaurateur and fellow South Carolinian Alexander Smalls, who then owned Café Beulah, placed the sole order.

But one sale wasn't enough to sustain a successful wholesale business, so Matt turned to a mail order model, and began selling boiled peanuts to expatriate Southerners around the country. When homesick Southern friends began asking for the boiled peanuts, Matt enlisted his brother Ted, then an editorial assistant at a publishing house. Together, on an ancient Singer sewing machine, they stitched up the first edition of "The Lee Bros. Boiled Peanuts Catalogue." Then the twosome drove a sample of boiled peanuts uptown to Florence Fabricant, who writes the "Food Notes" column for *The New York Times*.

On June 1, 1994, after she mentioned the boiled peanuts, 100 people called the first day alone, eager to get their hands on them, and letting the brothers know what else they wanted from the South. "The idea of cataloguing these things, and putting into print what constitutes the South Carolina Low Country cuisine, and then mailing it out, became their business," said Matt.

By December of 1994, the Lee brothers had moved back to South Carolina, found a building that became their office and warehouse,

and fully launched the catalogue. The Internet also became a boon. "It's such a tight little niche, that anyone on the Web looking for boiled peanuts, or Jerusalem artichoke relish, or even broader things like stone-ground grits, could find us really quickly."

Although the catalogue offers such evocative Southern fare as Guilford Hush Puppy Mix, Lineberger's Scuppernong Jelly, and Moon Pies, the best-selling catalogue item is—no surprise here—boiled peanuts. In addition to the fresh boiled peanuts, Roddenberry's Canned Green Boiled Peanuts also are a big seller. Initially, the brothers turned their nose up at the canned variety of boiled peanuts, "because anyone who knows boiled peanuts knows that canned ones aren't that special; they are usually made from a slightly lower quality grade of nuts."

But on the other hand, Matt continues, "There's a huge part of the South that believes that canned is an excellent way to have boiled peanuts, and I've come around to thinking that too." And, unlike the fresh, the canned peanuts can be shipped as far away as Saudi Arabia, Japan, and Africa. Alaska also has proven a fertile market for boiled peanuts, where the fishing and oil industries have drawn expatriate Southerners.

Matt says that he has "an armchair interest in culinary history," which stems from his study of art history in college. Toward the end of his college career, he realized he was not interested in academic history. "I was more interested in a grass roots form of history that I felt lent itself better to sharing and publishing, and even if it wasn't an

accurate, airtight form of history, I felt the benefits made up for the shortcomings. And besides, I like storytelling, so that also aided in my departure from the academic world."

From a culinary history standpoint, Matt notes that boiled peanuts are not unique to the South. "They are an outgrowth of any place that grows peanuts," which originated in South America, spread with the Spanish trade to Africa, and then to every temperate corner of the globe, including a wide swath of Asia. "I guess boiled peanuts are defined more by where they're not than where they are," he continues.

The Lee Bros. Boiled Peanuts Cookbook will be released in early 2004. Matt describes it as "a fairly wide-ranging Southern cookbook, but very much from our perspective of growing up in the South, and growing up in the South now. In other words, it will be about more than just boiled peanuts." His vision for promoting the book includes traveling across the country in a vehicle rigged with a custom-built barbecue, country ham refrigeration unit, and peanut-boiling rig, to allow people to sample true Low Country food in virtually any location. The Lee Brothers understand that one taste can be worth 1,000 words.

"The Lee Bros. Boiled Peanuts Catalogue" can be viewed online at <http://www.boiledpeanuts.com>.

Kara Newman, secretary of CHNY, is a freelance writer specializing in food and culture. She is a regular contributor to the food website eGullet (www.egullet.com).

REGIONAL CALENDAR

The following members are offering programs in the region. Please call numbers listed after each program for fees, times, and additional information:

SUSAN BALDASSANO

To Grandmother's House We Go.
Cooking and craft tours
www.tograndmother'shousewego.com
E-mail grancooks@earthlink.com
(718) 768-4662
Saturday, Feb. 7–Monday,
Feb. 16, 2004
Oaxaca Cooking and Crafts Tour

CATHY KAUFMAN, Chef-instructor,
The Institute of Culinary Education
Historical Fine Dining Series:
Tuesday, November 11
"Thanksgiving with Thomas
Jefferson" (lecture and hands-on)
Friday, December 12
"A Victorian Christmas Feast"
Institute of Culinary Education
New York
(212) 847-0770

ELIZABETH KNIGHT
English-style tea master
Saturday, November 15
Afternoon Tea at the St. Regis
(212) 753-4500

JUDITH KRALL-RUSSO, Food histo-
rian and tea specialist
Tuesday, October 28
"The History of Tea and Tea Leaf
Reading"
Edison Main Library, Edison, N.J.
(732) 549-1792

EXHIBIT: "Apron Strings:
Ties to the Past"
May 19–June 20, 2004
Montclair Museum,
Montclair, N.J.
(973)744-1796

MEMBER NEWS

Elizabeth Andoh's article, "The Realm of the Senses, A Food Lover's Guide to Tokyo," is scheduled to appear in the November issue of *Gourmet* magazine.

Helen Brody's book, *New Hampshire: From Farm to Kitchen* (Hippocrene Books), will be published in January 2004.

It profiles some of New Hampshire's most important working farms. Quick recipes make the connection between the



food we eat and the farmer who produces it.

In September, Betty Fussell delivered a lecture on "The Revolutionary Politics of a Seed Called Corn" for the Culinary Institute of American as part of The Carroll F. Dooley Lecture Series. In October, she did a workshop on "What the Old World Learned from the New World" as part of the Culinary Arts Program at the Center for Lifelong Learning at Boston University. As the frost hit the pumpkins, she celebrated a fall corn menu devised by Chef Ted Fondulas at Hemingway's Restaurant in Killington, Vermont.

Former Chair Alexandra Leaf is the proud mother of Daniel Luca Wajskol born October 3. "We are all mad for him—including his six-year-old sister Micol."

Jacqueline Newman reports the completion of a book for Greenwood Press on Chinese food culture in their upcoming series about different food cultures. She is currently working on preparing SUNY-Stony Brook's web-accessible annotations for the 2626 Chinese cookbooks she gave to the university. David Rosengarten in his *Rosengarten Report* praised *Flavor and Fortune*, the magazine that

she edits, as an authentic food source conceived and written by Chinese people from their perspective. CHNY members who wish to subscribe are eligible for a discount. Check out the magazine at www.flavorandfortune.com for additional information.

Kyle Shadix, CCC, MS, RD was recently named the Recognized Young Dietitian of the Year for New York City by the American Dietetic Association. Currently

Chef Kyle is the academic department director, Culinary & Pastry Arts, at the New York Restaurant School of the Art Institute of New York City. www.chefkyle.com

William Woys Weaver's *Country Scrapple: An American Tradition* has been published by Stackpole Books. The book is a survey not only of the origins of scrapple, but also of such closely related foods as Ohio "goetta," North Carolina

liver mush, and Appalachian "poor-do." There are also 20 recipes for making various types of scrapple and scrapple condiments. Weaver's book *America Eats* (1989) is serving as the culinary text for the Covington Woods Production of a major film called "The Woods," featuring Sigourney Weaver, William Hurt, Joaquin Phoenix, and Adrien Brody. Weaver is acting as an advisor to the producers.

Membership Application

(For current members, please write "Renewal" at the top)

At monthly meetings, the Culinary Historians of New York explore the historic, esoteric, and entertaining byways of food. These events are led by noted historians, authors, anthropologists, and food experts, many of whom are CHNY members.

Membership benefits include advance notice of all events, a membership directory, and the CHNY Newsletter with culinary history articles, news of members, events, and book reviews.

Individual – \$40 per year Household – \$60 per year
Corporate – \$125 per year Student/Senior – \$20 per year
Senior Household – \$30 per year

Name(s): _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Work Phone: _____ Home Phone: _____

e-mail: _____ Profession: _____

Culinary Interests (12 words max; information to appear in the next CHNY directory)

Willing to help with: Programs: _____ Membership: _____ Newsletter: _____

Please make check payable to CHNY and send with completed form to: The Culinary Historians of New York, Tracey D. Harwood, 93 Perry St. #13, New York, NY 10014.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

IN THIS ISSUE

Wednesday, November 19 "New York's First Regional Cuisine," Anne Mendelson.

This talk will discuss the food resources of the Lenape Indians in the lower Hudson Valley and the adjacent coastline (today's greater metropolitan region) just before the first boatload of colonists arrived in 1624.

Tuesday, December 9 "Art in Food/Food in Art," Peter G. Rose. Based on her recent book *Matters of Taste: Food and Drink in 17th Century Art and Life* (2002), the author will use slides of some of the Dutch Masters to illustrate how these art works give insight into seventeenth-century food practices and shed light on the Colonial diet of the Dutch settlers and their relevance to the American kitchen today.

2004

January "The History of Cold," Tom Shachtman.

The author will explore the advent of refrigeration and its influence.

February A special wine presentation.

March "Foods of the Silk Road," Jacqueline Newman.

An exploration of the food links between eastern and western cultures.

April "Eki-Ben and the Regional Cuisines of Japan," Elizabeth Andoh. Eki-Ben are the Bento Box meals sold at train stations throughout Japan. She will discuss the regional variations found in these elegant boxes.

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•CULINARY HISTORIANS OF NEW YORK•

C/O Stacey D. Harwood
93 Perry St. #13
New York, NY 10014