

## From Great Cake to Curiosity *On the Trail of the Hartford Election Cake*

By Stephen Schmidt

I GREW up in Mansfield, Connecticut, a small town in the northeastern corner of the state. In 1968 during the November election season, one of our local newspapers ran a recipe for Hartford Election Cake. I was a high school student and a budding baker, so the recipe caught my attention. It called for yeast, and I could tell that this “cake” was really a sort of raisin bread. Why then was the recipe called a cake? And what did it have to do with elections in Hartford?

The explanation takes us back several centuries.

In 1660, Connecticut and Rhode Island colonies were granted the right to elect their governors, rather than having their governors appointed by the crown, as was the case in other colonies, both then and later. In Connecticut, the day on which the governor was elected had already become a major holiday by the turn of the eighteenth century. In 1704, a Massachusetts woman named Sarah Kemble Knight, passing through Connecticut during election week in October, wrote in her diary, “Their Chief Red Letter day is St. Election, which is annually Observed according to Charter, to choose their Govern. a blessing they can never be thankfull enough for, as they will find, if ever it be their hard



Photo Courtesy of the Connecticut Historical Society.

*The Old Connecticut State House, built in 1796, where Amelia Simmons' Election Cake must have been served.*

fortune to loose it.” The reason that Election Day became a holiday in Connecticut can be teased out between the lines of Sarah Kemble Knight’s brief diary entry. In Puritan New England, the traditional English “red letter days”—religious holidays such as Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost as well as seasonal holidays like May Day—were banished, the former considered “Romish,” the latter pagan. In their place, the Puritans substituted a roster of purely secular holidays. In addition to Election Day, these included Commencement Day (originally associated with Harvard but later extended to Yale and other universities), Training Day (when

colonial militias trained in public), and Thanksgiving Day, which was rooted in the English harvest festival. All of these holidays had spread beyond Puritan New England, to varying degrees, long before the Revolution, though they were celebrated on different days and in different ways in the various colonies. In other colonies, whose governors continued to be appointed, Election Day was celebrated in connection with the election of representative legislative bodies, which all colonies had by the end of the seventeenth century.

When Sarah Kemble Knight passed through Connecticut, its

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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

**T**WENTY years ago, a small group of food scholars dreamt of forming an educational organization to further their interest in culinary history. Culinary history was a nascent study in 1980s America that defied traditional categorization and, unfortunately, academic respect: one needed to be an anthropologist, nutritionist, folklorist, linguist, bibliographer, historian, and, most dauntingly, a practical cook, to understand foodways from ancient times through the present. Inspired by the recently-founded Culinary Historians of Boston, Jackie Newman and Alice Ross recruited Marilyn Einhorn, Anne Mendelson, Anne Pascarelli, and Daniel Richards. Together this group, supported by other founding members, created the Culinary Historians of New York in the summer of 1985. Since that time, CHNY has provided inspiring lectures, workshops, and special events that have furthered our appreciation of culinary culture.

Culinary history has come a very long way in both academic and popular circles since the 1980s. CHNY is poised to support this growing field in **five** ways. **First**, we hope to expand our website, [www.culinaryhistoriansny.org](http://www.culinaryhistoriansny.org), with work from our erudite membership. We have received favorable comments from culinary historians worldwide on the website's content and its beautiful design by CHNY member Tae Ellin. I want to encourage everyone to visit the site and contribute an article, essay or "Recipe with History." Calendar entries can also be submitted to

Tae for posting to improve everyone's ability to learn of relevant events in a timely fashion.

**Second**, we are working to increase the number of sponsored events. By collaborating with other organizations, we are offering two programs in both September and October, a trend we hope to continue. The second October program is especially noteworthy: a symposium held in conjunction with the Oxford University Press and the Institute of Culinary Education to mark the publication of the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America*. CHNY member Andy Smith is the editor-in-chief, and I am thrilled to report that many, many CHNY members have contributed to this groundbreaking two-volume work.

CHNY will celebrate the twentieth anniversary of its first program in November, 2005. As our **third** goal, we would like to hold an anniversary dinner, perhaps recreating historic recipes, to commemorate this milestone. In addition to recognizing CHNY's accomplishments on this festive occasion, we would like to take the opportunity to look forward. Thus, our **fourth** goal is to create a \$1,000 annual stipend (CHNY finances permitting) to support research or academic study in the field of culinary history. The stipend would be awarded on the basis of competitive application, and we propose announcing the recipient of the award at CHNY's twentieth anniversary dinner. **Fifth**, we would also like to honor past pioneers in culinary history who have made notable contribu-

## MICHIGAN CULINARY RESEARCH CENTER TO BE DEDICATED

tions to the field; it is shameful that there is no American 'Oscar' for culinary history. Therefore, we propose making each annual stipend 'in honor of' a culinary scholar and would like that the first stipend honor long-time member, frequent presenter, and noted culinary historian, Karen Hess.

These goals are ambitious and will require the volunteer support of CHNY members to turn them into reality. I invite all interested members to contact me or other members of the Steering Committee about contributing to our wonderful organization.



Cathy Kaufman  
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THERE is a new jewel in the crown for culinary researchers at the University of Michigan's William L. Clements Library in Ann Arbor. The Janice Bluestein Longone Center for American Culinary Research will be dedicated in May in connection with the library's First Biennial Symposium on American Culinary History. To supplement the Clements' extensive collection of American history and culture, Jan Longone, culinary historian, antiquarian cookbook collector, and founder of the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor (CHAA), has donated her extensive collection to the library. "My collection complements the Clements and can you imagine my good for-

tune in having this opportunity to work as a Curator of American Culinary History in this remarkable library. I even have a key!"

To supplement her book collection, she has enlisted 15 docents and members of CHAA to catalogue 7-10,000 pieces of advertising ephemera, menus, and other miscellaneous items. They are cataloging each pamphlet under a variety of subject headings to make them as accessible as possible.

The first biennial Symposium on American Culinary History and the dedication of her collection will be May 13-15, 2005. See Clements Library site [www.ClementsLibrary@umich.edu](http://www.ClementsLibrary@umich.edu) for details.

## PROGRAM SUMMARIES

### ANCIENT WINE

Presented by Dr. Patrick McGovern, February, 2004

Teetotalers and beer-swilling barbarians, beware! According to Dr. Patrick McGovern of the University of Pennsylvania and author of *Ancient Wine: The Search for the Origins of Viniculture* (Princeton University Press 2003), wine is inextricably linked with the founding of civilization. Wine emerged as an important beverage during the Neolithic Age, ca. 8,500 - 4,000 B.C.E., and McGovern persuasively argues that the discovery and harnessing of grape fermentation may antedate beer and bread fer-

mentations because grape skins contain naturally-occurring yeasts, while barley does not. Although no jugs brimming with wine have been found to allow modern archaeologists a refreshing tippie of ancient brews, chemical solvents have proved that the reddish residues found in pottery shards from excavations in what is now Iran are tartaric acid and tree resins, that is, resinated wine.

Early wine was probably discovered by happy accident: the juices from grapes on the bottom of heavy piles would start to ferment naturally, yielding what McGovern classed a "Stone Age Beaujolais nouveau." Without storage containers to exclude oxy-

gen, the liquid would quickly oxidize, making wine a brief seasonal libation. Wine making improved as the Neolithic period progressed, and when large pottery vessels fitted with clay stoppers held the precious liquid. The vessels had narrow mouths and bulbous bases that facilitated fermentation. The process generated so much carbon dioxide that the vessels literally would rock back and forth, undoubtedly adding to the mystique of the beverage. The well-to-do were no slouches when it came to drinking; one house investigated in ancient Iran had six nine liter wine jugs, enough for a small frat party.

McGovern subscribes to the

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## Program Summaries

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“Noah” hypothesis, seeing a single point of origin and domestication for grapes, possibly in eastern Turkey, where other crucial foodstuffs were domesticated, such as einkorn wheat, chickpeas and vetch. He believes, based on archaeological evidence, that the domesticated grape spread east to Mesopotamia, and west to Egypt, where wine remained a drink for the elites. Much of the fashion for early wine consumption relied on trade; in pre-Dynastic Egypt (ca. 3150 B.C.E.), some 700 jars of imported wine have been found in the tomb of the ominously-named King Scorpion I, located 650 kilometers south of Memphis. Even more stunning, however, is McGovern’s conclusion, based on the high tech “instrumental neutron activation analysis” (a way of analyzing trace elements in clays), that the clay jars in Scorpion’s tomb came from areas in and around the Gaza Strip, Israel, and Jordan, more than 700 miles away, and that the jars were filled with Levant wine. Long distance wine trade thus existed more than 5,000 years ago.

Given that even the best clay vessels cannot be airtight, most ancient wines appear to have been preserved with tree resins, which are antioxidants. The tradition continues directly in Retsina, the Greek wine with a distinctive flavor that many modern palates pooh-pooh. Although the introduction of glass bottles with cork stoppers over the past few hundred years have greatly lengthened wine’s keeping qualities, wine snobs should remember that many of the world’s finest wines are aged in wood barrels before bottling. This contact with wood adds dis-

tinctive (sometimes over-oaky) flavors and performs much of the function of the tree resins of the ancient world.

The ancients flavored their wines with raisins, dried figs, and, eventually, honey and spices. The additional concentrated sugar in the dried fruits would add flavor and boost the fermentation. Red wines predominate in most of the residues, although there is some evidence that white wines also were made and were considered the more elite drink. Eventually, famous recipes, such as the one known as Apicius’s *conditum paradoxum*, or spiced wine surprise, were developed. This recipe is thought to have been written in the first century B.C.E., and the honey, dates, and mastic (a resin) found in *conditum paradoxum* may begin to suggest the flavors of earlier wines in the eastern Mediterranean. The Barbara Flower and Elisabeth Rosenbaum translation of the original Latin can be found on the CHNY website, followed by my contemporary adaptation of the recipe, should you want to experiment with ancient wines.

—CATHY KAUFMAN

## FOODS OF THE SILK ROAD

Presented by Jacqueline Newman  
March, 2004

Some say it marked the beginning of globalization. YoYo Ma called it the “internet of antiquity.” It is referred to today as the Silk Road and it was the subject of Jacqueline Newman’s address to the historians at the China Institute.

The setting was appropriate because Newman, author, researcher, magazine editor (*Flavor & Fortune*), “Dedicated to the Art

and Science of Chinese Cuisine”), and Queens College professor emeritus, spoke of the Silk Road from a Chinese perspective. She credits the origin of the road to Emperor Wu Di in the Han Dynasty about 2000 years ago, who became curious about the West when he heard tales of fast beasts called horses and strange kinds of food from soldiers returning from the front. He sent emissaries west to find out more. They returned with grape seeds, alfalfa, and horses. The Chinese began to import more items. Soon trade routes were established and the Chinese began to enjoy flat bread, cumin, mutton, and new fruits of all kinds. They learned how to grill meat, eat organ meats, freeze yak, use blood in their sausages, make wine, and roast grains. In turn they exported pearls, sandalwood, jade, rice, and, of course, silk to the Roman Empire and elsewhere.

The Silk Road was not just one route, she told us. There were several routes that crossed east to west from the China Sea to the Mediterranean Ocean, and also south to north, connecting the cross-continental routes. The foods eaten along the route were of staggering diversity and were as multi-cultural as the traders leading their beasts of burden (camels as well as donkeys and horses). Towns were established along the routes where tradesmen would spend the night, carousing with women and drinking into the wee hours. They only traveled in daylight for fear of bandits at night.

From sea to ocean was a journey of eight to nine months and few traders made it the entire length of the route. More often a trader would cover part of the journey and then hand over his goods

and pack animals to another man, and the entire route would be covered by several changes of traders.

By the 13th century China's leadership became far more insular and ships began to pick up the burden of carrying goods from east to west and back. Trade along the Silk Road eventually died out. But interest in the Silk Road has revived. About 40 years ago, as the desert sand shifted, an entire monastery was revealed containing new clues to Silk Road life still preserved in the dry desert sand.

Before Newman spoke, the historians were fortified with foods that were related to the Silk Road: Spicy Cumin Lamb Kebabs, Xian Eggplant & Pomegranate Salad, Flat Bread, and Steamed Buns with Curried Chicken, all washed down with wine. —JOHN JENKINS

## EKIBEN: A CULINARY TRAIN TOUR OF JAPAN

Presented by Elizabeth Andoh  
April, 2004

We gathered at the Horticultural Society of NY on a rainy April evening to hear Elizabeth Andoh, a Tokyo resident and culinary historian, discuss *ekiben*. Refreshments that evening focused on food typically found in *obento*, the conveniently boxed Japanese meals: *omusubi*, rice balls wrapped with *nori* and filled with salmon, plum, or *chirimen* (miniscule dried sardines), colorful *daikon* and *shibazuke* (eggplants, gourds, and ginger pickled with *aka-jiso* leaves) pickles, green tea cake, green tea cookies, and handy pack-in-your-bag plastic bottles of iced green tea and black tea.

*Eki* means (train) station, *ben* means boxed meal. An *ekiben* is a

packed-to-go meal sold at train stations. *Ekiben* were documented as early as 1885, at the Utsunomiya train Station west of Tokyo, where a gentleman with the equivalent of a bed & breakfast sold *ekiben* to people leaving for Tokyo. Within five years, every train station in existence sold *ekiben*. Train travel has been the most popular means of transportation in Japan since the end of the 19th century, with a vast network of intra-urban trains and trains connecting urban centers with each other.

According to Andoh the first literary reference to road food, however, comes from the Tale of Genji written in the 12th century, which mentions *tonjiki* – from the words “ton” (to gather together) and *jiki* (food), the prototype for modern-day *omusubi*.

After explaining the origins of *ekiben*, Andoh presented a slide show of flyers and posters provided by Keio Department store, located adjacent to Shinjuku, one of the largest train stations in the Tokyo metropolitan area.

The contents of *ekiben* meals varies with the region where they are made and sold. For example, the *omusubi*, pressed rice wrapped with *nori* and stuffed with fish or vegetables, can be a triangle, sphere, or oblong. The outside wrapper and inside stuffing can also vary.

In Hokkaido, the northernmost island of Japan, seafood typically is included in *ekiben*, particularly the “triumvirate of seafood”: *kani* (crab), *uni* (sea urchin) and *ikura* (salmon roe). *Oya-ko*, or “parent and child” combinations also are popular, such as salmon and *ikura*, or herring and its roe. *Komochi kombu*, a great delicacy in Japan, is kelp on which herring have laid their eggs.

Meanwhile, the area along the ancient Tokaido Road, which links Tokyo and Kyoto, is known for growing tea, so rice used in *bento* boxes in that region may be cooked in tea instead of water.

Further south, the coastal Hamamatsu is known for its *unagi*, or eel. Therefore, eel with red wine, an updated version of a classic style, also typically is included in *ekiben* in this region.

Andoh also showed slides of *obento* boxes popular with children, including the Hello Kitty lunch box. Stamps are used to punch *nori* into the shape of a Hello Kitty face, which might be placed atop chicken rice. It's not unusual for children's *obento* to contain whimsical shapes, such as a hot dog split open to look like an octopus.

The prices for *ekiben* can vary widely, although most sell in the range of \$10 to \$12. One vendor in Tokyo station sells luxury bento boxes for about \$37. Only 50 are made per day, and the boxes are available by reservation.

Even when the meal is gone, many travelers keep the paper tops, wrappers and teapots that come with *ekiben* as collectibles. Andoh also showed us some samples, including some of the more collectible *ekiben* wrappers, which can sell for as much as five to seven thousand dollars at auction.

—Kara Newman

NEW YORK CITY  
GREENMARKETS  
*History and Inside View*  
May, 2004

In 1976 Barry Benepe, architect and city planner, while on the job in upstate New York, discovered

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## Program Summaries

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that many of the apple orchards and family farms in the area were on the verge of bankruptcy. Supermarkets were getting their produce flown in from the West Coast and local growers were unable to sell enough to their neighbors to survive. The population in these rural communities was not large enough to constitute a sufficient market. So ... why not sell the produce in an area where the population density is greatest?

With the help of The Council on the Environment of New York City, Barry Benepe's brainchild became a reality. That summer the first greenmarket, with a small handful of farmers, opened in an empty lot on the corner of Second Avenue and 59th Street. Today there are 30 markets serviced by almost 200 farmers spread over the five boroughs. The story of that success was the topic of a panel discussion on a recent spring evening at The Carriage House, home to the Earth Pledge Foundation.

The panel was chaired by teacher and author Richard Ruben. The panelists were Amy Nicholson, a third generation apple farmer from Red Jacket Orchards; Dan Barber, chef of Blue Hill restaurant in New York City and of Blue Hill at Stone Barns Center, the newly developed farm at the Rockefeller Estate at Pocantico Hills north of the city; and Barry Benepe himself.

Benepe described the early beginnings of the Greenmarket and how it has grown. When queried about the arrival of a Whole Foods market to Union Square, he asserted that it would only increase the number of customers exposed to the Greenmarket. He also pointed

out that the recent addition of Monday to the Union Square schedule meant more organic and free range products.

Amy Nicholson explained the impact Greenmarket has had on her family's business. Now they grow moderate quantities of 24 varieties of apple instead of large quantities of just the few varieties

necessary for mass distribution.

Barber, who supplied the asparagus soup that was one of the foods on the buffet, after welcoming the group, said that the Greenmarket was a major inspiration for his menus as it was with most of the city's serious chefs.

—JOHN JENKINS

## MEMBER PROFILE

### LAURA SHAPIRO

By Helen Brody

Because the art of putting words down on paper had always been a compelling urge for **Laura Shapiro**, taking up the journalist trade on small papers in and about Cambridge, MA, after graduating from Harvard in 1968, seemed a logical first step in a career devoted to writing.

Eventually, she established herself as one of the country's foremost culinary historians, but typically, her route to such exalted status was a circuitous one. First came writing dance reviews for the local papers, a task for which she seemed infinitely capable; her father played the French horn for the Boston symphony and music had always been an integral part of her life.

While working those stints in city rooms, she began haunting the stacks at Radcliffe's famed Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America where she found her abiding interest in women's history. Later she went on to write reviews for the *Boston Globe*, but never far from her mind was the dream of all young journal-

ists to write a full-fledged book. She began doing research on the famed Fannie Farmer.

"I could only find scraps of material on her," she says, "but I began to suspect that something was happening in the kitchen during the turn of the 19th to 20th centuries to change the way food was prepared." Shapiro's first book, *Perfection Salad*, published in 1986 to great acclaim, was a study of "scientific cookery," a reform movement that took root when cooking experts, like Fannie Farmer, in an effort to give cooking an air of respectability in the workplace, moved cooking from the home kitchen into a laboratory-like atmosphere. Exact measurements, detailed descriptions of display, and unconventional visual and flavor combinations were given in detail and to be followed exactly as written. Creativity was discouraged.

Holding firm to the notion of women's history as a link between dance and food, Shapiro became *Newsweek's* dance and book reviewer. But in the meantime, she





also began research on the post World War II food era, leaving *Newsweek* in 2000 to work full-time on her recently published *Something from the Oven*, “Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America.”

In it, she delves into the period when food manufacturers attempted to capitalize on newly developed war-time technology. Advertisements and news articles were circulated extensively in an attempt to persuade families that manufactured foods were the only escape from the burden of such chores as standing over a hot stove. In fact, many home cooks, with new post-war kitchen tools to assist them, were discovering for themselves what kitchen chores they would be willing to relinquish. “Excellence of product,” says Shapiro, was overlooked for “ease of preparation.”

As with so many writers, Shapiro does not trust research to be left only on the computer. She takes notes with her laptop and later prints everything out. Her cabinets are bulging with files often with general names like “Being Women” or “The Food” -random pages from publications like *Better Homes and Gardens* salad stories – from which she can draw for future research. . “Many years ago, I rented a large space,” Shapiro says, “and my files consisted of piles on the floor where I could see everything at once. It was a superior system.” The file subjects narrow as she progresses on to a future book, for which “I am looking around every corner for inspiration,” she says.

Currently, Shapiro, writes dance reviews for *New York Magazine* and lives in a west side New York apartment with her husband, Jack Hawley, who is a professor of

religion at Barnard College and teaches at Columbia University. Her daughter Nell (to whom *Something from the Oven* is dedicated), is a junior at The Dalton School and is “moving into an interest in the kitchen.” A birthday present was chocolate dipped macaroons. “I have dreams of her becoming a pastry chef,” Shapiro

beams. (Laura Shapiro will be a program speaker on Wednesday, October 13, 2004.)

**Helen Brody** is newsletter editor, a food writer, and the author of two books. The most recent is *New Hampshire: From Farm to Kitchen* (Hippocrene Books, 2004).

## MEMBER NEWS

**Pat Bartholomew**, professor, Department of Hospitality Management, NYC College of Technology, City University of New York, co-authored a paper called, “Impact of 9/11 Terrorism on the New York City Restaurant Industry: Strategic Responses for Survival.” It won a best paper award at The Global Advocate of Hospitality and Tourism Educators’ international convention in Philadelphia in July.

In May, **Rynn Berry** launched his new book *Hitler: Neither Vegetarian nor Animal Lover* debunking the widely held myth that Hitler was a vegetarian. *The New York Times* dining section recently recommended his *The Vegan Guide of New York City*. His article on the history of vegetarianism in America will be published in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America*.

**Claudia M. Caruana’s** recipe for spicy baked rice, which appeared in *Chile Pepper Magazine*, was selected for inclusion in *The Best American Recipes*, 2003–2004.

**Judith Hausman**, a restaurant reviewer for *The Journal News* in White Plains, NY, will judge the

pies and cakes again this year for the South Salem (NY) Library Fair.

On Thursday, December 9, 2004, **Cathy Kaufman** will deliver a lecture at Sotheby’s Institute of Art entitled, “For Want of Tradition: Nineteenth Century Christmas Dinner in America.” Co-sponsored by the Merchant’s House

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## IN MEMORIAM



**Lee Coleman**, treasurer for many years, passed away on July 12th after a short illness. The services were private. The family asks that those wishing to remember her with a gift make a donation to their local Hospice & Palliative Care Program, and to “Remember Lee in your thoughts, prayers, and the music you hear.”

## Member News

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Museum, the lecture will explore the changing menus and class dynamics of Christmas dinner in nineteenth century America. A reception with period refreshments will start at 6 P.M.; the lecture will follow at 6:30. The fee for the event is \$30. Sotheby's Institute of Art is at 1334 York Avenue, (212) 894-1111. From December 2 to January 10, 2005, the Merchant's House will display a table of period Christmas confectations designed by Kaufman, and a Christmas tree decorated in the style of the 1850s and 1860s. The Museum is located at 29 East 4th Street, (212) 777-1089.

**Judith Krall-Russo** has scheduled programs on English tea, the New Jersey cranberry, apple products, and Christmas customs over the next few months in New Jersey. E-mail her at [karusso@erols.com](mailto:karusso@erols.com) for dates and locations or check the CHNY website. She has been studying the Japanese Tea Ceremony at the Urasenke Chanoyu Center in New York City and in April attended the symposium "Liquid Culture: Coffee, Chocolate and Tea in Early Modern Europe" at the Bard Graduate Center.

An article by **Renee Marton** called "Food Voices in the Kitchen" appeared in the Spring 2004 issue of *Food, Culture and Society* (vol 7, no. 1) published by the Association for the Study of Food and Society. The subject was her teaching technique to help Latin "new-immigrant" students in commercial foodservice classes retain French culinary terminology while they were taking English as a second language (their primary language was Spanish).

The thrust of the whole issue is based on a concept called the *Food Voice*, developed by member **Annie Hauck-Lawson**.

**Kathleen McElroy** has been named Dining Editor of *The New York Times*.

**Marion Nestle** has been appointed Paulette Goddard Professor in the department of Nutrition, Food Studies and Public Health at NYU. Her book *Safe Food* won NYU's research prize. She was named the alumna of the year at the University of California School of Public Health.

Greenwood Press has recently published **Jacqueline Newman's** book *Food Culture in China* stressing the importance of food in Chinese culture and society. It is one in a series called *Food Culture Around the World*. Newman has recently been on a trip researching Chinese food in New Zealand.

**Lucy Norris**, author of *Pickled: Preserving a World of Tastes and Traditions* has moved to Portland, OR. She will be continuing research for her next book about family farms and sustainable meat and cheese production in the U.S.

**Diana Pittet**, currently enrolled in the master's program in Food Studies at NYU, published an annotated bibliography on the "food voice" for *Food, Culture and Society* (vol 7, no. 1).

**Susan McLellan Plaisted**, Proprietress of Heart to Hearth Cookery is offering bake oven, hearth cooking and chocolate workshops in Pennsylvania. Check the CHNY website for details or her own

website at [www.Hearttohearthcookery.com](http://www.Hearttohearthcookery.com).

**Barry Popik** has put much of his New York City food research called "The Big Apple," at [www.barrypopik.com](http://www.barrypopik.com). The site contains information on the origin of New York City's nickname, published in time for 2004's Big Apple Fest of sculptures. The site contains information about 40 NYC foods. Barry is a contributor to the *Oxford Encyclopedia on Food and Drink in America*.

**Peter Rose's** book *Matters of Taste: Food and Drink in 17th-Century Art and Life* received an excellent review by Gilian Riley in *Gastronomica*. On December 14, as part of the Lunch Speakers Series, she will give a talk at Fraunces Tavern about the Forgotten Holidays introduced by the Dutch, which became part of American customs.

**William Woys Weaver** will be taking his Ph.D. in foodways at University College, Dublin. He is entering a specially tailored three-year program. His dissertation, to be published as a book, will deal with traditional pork consumption in Cyprus, with material drawn from archeological sites, medieval records, and actual fieldwork among village butchers and cooks. Cyprus under the Ottoman Turks was a center for the production of hams and other products exported to Christians in the Levant, Egypt, and the Middle East. Because pork was sacred to Aphrodite, the island has a long, fascinating culinary relationship with pigs.

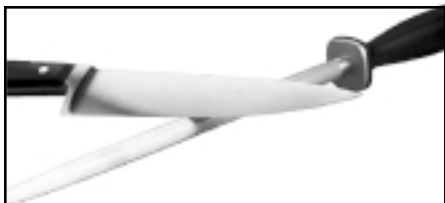
**Doris Weisberg** will be teaching a course entitled "Celluloid Cuisine: A Retrospective of Food and Din-



ing in Film” at NYU for the Fall 2004 semester. The course will include several films and short subjects rarely seen, and classic feature films produced in different countries at different times. Filmmakers, food stylists, and historians, will be commenting on the films. For information and enrollment call NYU at (212) 998-7143.

## AMERICAN CULINARY SOURCE TO BE RELEASED

Oxford University Press will release the two-volume *Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America* in early October. The editor-in-chief is CHNY member Andrew F. Smith; other editors from New York include CHNY Chair Cathy Kaufman, Karen Hess, Alice Ross, Cara De Silva, and Barry Popik. Many CHNY members contributed entries to the encyclopedia. Four release parties for the encyclopedia have been scheduled. The New York event, co-sponsored by CHNY, will be held on October 19 at the Institute of Culinary Education. More information about this event will be sent to CHNY members shortly, and can be found on the website, [www.culinaryhistoriansny.org](http://www.culinaryhistoriansny.org).



As a side light to her part-time knife and scissor sharpening business, **Natanya Siegel** is researching the history of both subjects and is looking for source suggestions.

Please contact her at [natanyasiegel@netzero.net](mailto:natanyasiegel@netzero.net).

## Election Cake

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residents observed Election Day by putting aside their normal work routines. Many spent the morning at a service in the meeting house, where they heard a lengthy Election Day sermon. In well-to-do households the noonday dinner, then the main meal of the day, was lavish and celebratory. And in the evening, leading families in villages and towns, as well as the governor's household in Hartford, the colonial capital, staged Election Day "drinkings." These drinkings were public festivals of a sort, open to anyone who wanted to attend, and like the English festivals after which they were patterned, these drinkings featured a very large cake, or "great cake," which, in its great size, embodied the spirit of the occasion and, of course, provided servings for multitudes of revelers. The typical proportions for great cake outlined in seventeenth-century English cookbooks and cookery manuscripts are a peck of flour, then reckoned at 14½ pounds, about 10 pounds of fruit (mostly raisins and currants), a pound or two of butter, a dozen or so eggs, a couple of quarts of milk, and liquid yeast, various spices, and a little sugar. These proportions produce a free-form or cast loaf. The cake was baked directly on the oven floor, not in a pan, and was about a yard in diameter and a foot high, certainly an impressive cake. Meanwhile, some early English cookery sources carry recipes for great cakes based on a bushel, or four pecks, of flour, and it is reasonable to speculate that such a truly stupendous great cake may have been brought forth at the governor's drinking. The logistics of baking such an enormous cake

confound me. Did even the largest-capacity period brick ovens, such as those in taverns and inns, have doors wide enough to accommodate such a beast?

The itemized record of Connecticut's Election Day expenditures for the year 1771 certainly point toward a cake in the bushel range. All told, the Connecticut colony spent a little over £23 on "sundries," including "cake," for its Election Day festivities in that year. The materials of "the great election cake" itself cost £3, and a certain Mrs. Ledlie was paid a little over £2 for making it. In 1771, £5 was a hefty sum to pay for a cake! Other items purchased included pipes, tobacco, candles, cider, porter, and cheese, all necessary for a proper drinking. We do not have Mrs. Ledlie's recipe, alas, but perhaps it was similar to the famous recipe for election cake outlined in the second edition of Amelia Simmons' *American Cookery*, 1796, our nation's first cookbook. Simmons calls for 30 quarts of flour, which, in measure, is nearly the same as a bushel, or 32 quarts. I have often wondered what prompted Simmons to run this recipe. Perhaps by the late eighteenth century various municipalities had come to stage Election Day drinkings in the town hall and needed guidance in preparing the daunting cake.

We can consider the publication of Simmons' Election Cake a watershed in the history of the cake. By the early nineteenth century, new developments in American cake-baking, social life, and politics were already conspiring to turn the old election great cake into a more modern, and perhaps lesser, thing.

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## Election Cake

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By the early 1800s, yeast-raised celebration cakes were antique. Indeed, in fashionable circles, they had already been outmoded for several generations. The old cakes had been usurped in most festal contexts—for example, at weddings, christenings, and Twelfth Night parties—by large fruited pound cakes, which most Americans called plum cakes (in reference to their raisins and currants, or “little plums”) through the 1820s and thereafter referred to as black cakes or fruitcakes. Only in the context of the old New England holidays of Election Day, Commencement Day, and Thanksgiving did yeast-raised cakes survive, out of tradition and nostalgia, much like turkey hangs on at today’s Thanksgiving feasts. Reflecting period tastes in cake, the election cakes outlined in cookbooks of the early-to-mid 1800s are considerably richer and sweeter than their seventeenth-century predecessors. Indeed, some are made with so much butter and sugar that they can just barely be raised by yeast. All are baked in pans, not as cast loaves. And one, from Kentucky cookbook author Lettice Bryan, is not, in its form, even really a cake. Bryan makes up the dough of her 1839 election cake as individual buns. I infer that to Bryan, as to us today, a “cake” raised with yeast was hardly a cake at all. It was a bread.

Meanwhile, the context of the cake had changed as well. Except in remote places, Americans no longer staged drinkings. Indeed, by the 1820s, with temperance on the rise, many Americans did not drink alcohol at all. Nor did wealthy families or government of-

ficials customarily throw their homes open to the public. Entertainments were now private. By the early 1800s, most Americans celebrated Election Day proper with an evening party—something like a large supper party served buffet-style—and then, during election week, staged a series of small afternoon or evening teas, which, according to Augustus Kendall, an Englishman travelling through America in 1807, featured “relics of election cake.” For an Election Day bash plus relics, housewives required a cake weighing five to seven pounds, precisely the size outlined in cookbook recipes of the first half of the nineteenth century. These were large cakes, to be sure, but not “great cakes”: they could be baked in a contemporary large roasting pan.

Finally, political developments led to the inexorable decline of Election Day as a holiday, and as the holiday waned, so inevitably did its cake. In the new American republic, the most important elections were those for president and members of congress, which now took place in the fall. Election Day, as a holiday, had nothing to do with these. Rather, it continued to be celebrated in conjunction with state and local elections, now held in the spring, and these elections, obviously, inspired less passion than the national ones. Although the cookbook evidence confirms that Election Day was informally observed throughout the country during the first half of the nineteenth century, it may have been an official holiday only in Connecticut and a few other New England states. And only in Connecticut, its birthplace, did the holiday remain a major red letter

day. In Hartford, it was celebrated with a grand parade featuring the governor’s renowned Foot Guard, a quasi-military company of gentlemen decked out in splendid scarlet uniforms. Augustus Kendall, our English traveller, who diverted his itinerary expressly in order to view the parade and the other official activities of Election Day 1807, declared that the “scene” left “a pleasing and respectful impression.” He also commented that the holiday “indemnified...servants and others...for the loss of the festivals of Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide, which the principles of their church deny them.”

After the Civil War, state elections and most—though not all—local elections came to be held on the same day as national elections, even in Connecticut, and Election Day entirely ceased to be. There was no longer any pressing need for the holiday in any case, as New Englanders had, by this time, enthusiastically embraced Christmas and other church holidays. Still, Election Day, and its cake, were fondly remembered. In *A New England Girlhood*, published in Boston in 1889, Lucy Larcom fondly recalls her mother’s election cake: “It came at the most delightful season, the last of May, [when] lilies and tulips were in bloom... It was nothing but a kind of sweetened bread...but we thought it was delicious.” And even Fannie Farmer, though generally a very forward-looking cookbook author, saw fit to run a recipe for election cake in her extraordinarily influential cookbook of 1896. Farmer’s cake, to be sure, bears little resemblance to Simmons’ cake, outlined precisely one century earlier.

Farmer starts with a mere cup-

ful of leftover bread dough, adds chopped figs, and covers her cake with a fashionable boiled icing.

The interesting question is why election cake is remembered today at all, while the similar breadlike commencement cakes and Thanksgiving cakes disappeared entirely from American cookbooks by 1900. Surely, it is because newspaper food writers have found themselves in need of a fitting subject during election week but have found nothing at hand other than this odd antique cake. There are contemporary graduation cakes, and there all sorts of contemporary notions about a proper Thanksgiv-

ing meal, but Americans no longer connect elections, whether national, state, or local, with any specific sort of feasting. Perhaps this is because Americans have long since come to take the right to vote for granted, an attitude that would have astonished the seventeenth-century residents of Connecticut.

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**Stephen Schmidt**, a member since 1999, and currently vice chair, is the author of *Master Recipes* (1987), a general-purpose cookbook. He is at work on *Dessert in America*, a history with recipes, to be published by Scribner. He contributed the cakes entry of Oxford *Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America* and is helping to prepare the 2006 edition of *Joy of Cooking*. He has written about contemporary cooking and food history for a number of periodicals, has lectured on food history at the Smithsonian, CHNY, and at cooking schools, and has prepared an Elizabethan banquet at the James Beard Foundation.

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# UPCOMING PROGRAMS

**Monday, September 20**

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

“New Hampshire: A Study in Agricultural and Culinary Innovation.”

Helen Brody, Author of *New Hampshire: From Farm to Kitchen*

**Saturday, October 9** Walking Tour: Indian Markets in Jackson Heights walking tour – Ammini Ramachandran

**Wednesday, October 13** “How the Food Industry Tried to Change the Way We Cook, and How Women Fought Back”

Laura Shapiro, author of *Something from the Oven*

**Tuesday, October 19** Release Party: *Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America*, Institute of Culinary Education

**Tuesday, November 9** “History of American Women through Food and Recipes” Laura Schenone, Author, *A Thousand Years Over a Hot Stove*

**Tuesday, December 14** “The History of Punch”

(Co-Sponsor: Culinary Arts Committee of the National Arts Club)

Dave Wondrich, Drink Historian

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