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# Report

Quarterly Newsletter of the Cultural Council of Ann Arbor

## MAIZE IN COLONIAL NEW ENGLAND

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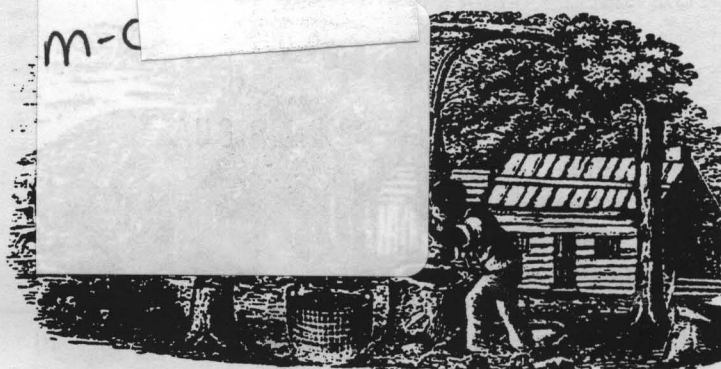
## COLONIZING AN ALIEN CORN

by James E. McWilliams

*James McWilliams of Austin, TX, is completing a doctoral dissertation on domestic economic development in colonial Massachusetts. His article "Oppression, Opportunity, and Slave Foodways" appeared in our Fall 1999 issue.*

Between 1630 and 1640, over 4000 English families settled in New England. One motivating factor driving their migration was, of course, religious. It remains a staple of historical lore that the Puritans sought to build "a city on a hill." As envisioned by John Winthrop Jr., a leading Bay Colony resident, the new settlement would be a model community that so thoroughly embodied Protestant ideals that the Church of England would inevitably admire its distant example and, in response, purify its own increasingly "corrupt" Catholic predilections. Tens of thousands of men, women and children crossed the Atlantic to start a new life in an unfamiliar world, and their thoughts seized on the inner grace that would simultaneously save their souls while strengthening the bonds of their freshly covenanted community.

Despite their utopian aims, the Puritans were essentially a pragmatic people. As we have more recently come to learn, economic considerations played an equally important role in the decision to abandon the Mother Country.<sup>1</sup> While landed gentry played the leading role in settling other American colonies, in New England the vast majority of the first generation came from middle-class backgrounds, had moved repeatedly within England in search of greater opportunity, and possessed only modest amounts of real and moveable estate. These families, moreover, were beginning to confront an economic situation in England that threatened their ability to live as free-born



A settler pounding corn.

English citizens. Opportunities to pursue mixed agriculture on ample land were rapidly diminishing while England's population continued to expand. Fathers who had inherited unprecedentedly small plots of land rightly foresaw a lower standard of living for themselves and their children. Legal possession of ample land and the protected freedom to improve it for future generations remained the most integral element of English cultural identity. New England, given these concerns, suddenly appeared to be a viable, if distant, safety valve for continuing a way of life cherished but under siege.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, another move, but with a new set of challenges. Seeking both to purify the Anglican church and to replicate the economic conditions which confirmed their cultural identity, these settlers encountered one of their most conspicuous obstacles in the form— of all things— of maize. It was the grain most suited to thrive in New England's soil, and thus the grain most appropriate for a settlement society, yet maize must initially have caused most Englishmen to cringe. Instead of organized rows of carefully maintained crops, colonists would have encountered seemingly random patches of corn stalks haphazardly interlaced with squashes, pumpkins, tobacco, tree stumps, and beans. Instead of yeoman farmers and their male servants and sons tending fenced fields with shovels and hoes, they would have found Indian wo-

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# AN ALIEN CORN *(continued from previous page)*

men working unbounded ground with clamshells. Instead of rows of wheat that they could look down upon, they would have been enclosed in towering stalks of grain that grew six to eight feet high. In short, maize would have deeply offended the agricultural sensibilities of most English migrants, and confirmed the "barbarous" stigma that a century of English commentary had attached to it. The Elizabethan herbalist John Gerard aptly reflected the prevailing cultural impression when he deemed maize "a more convenient food for swine than for man."<sup>3</sup>

His was an opinion; however, in which the English could not afford to indulge. As much as they may have wanted to join Gerard's spirited denigration of maize, the realities of settling a new world reinforced a reluctant dependence on it. Maize required less labor to plant, maintain, and harvest than wheat, an especially important consideration in a colony that could not afford to import a steady supply of cheap labor. Hence their bind: on the one hand, a quest to replicate all things English; on the other, the economic necessity of growing a crop associated with "the barbarous Indians, who know no better."<sup>4</sup>

The English solution, consistent with the irony that seemed to define colonial British America, was to adopt a cultural process employed for thousands of years by Native Americans. It had been 10,000 years since maize had grown in an uncultivated state as a natural grass; by the time of European contact, maize did not rule cultures, rather cultures ruled maize. Groups of Native Americans repeatedly took advantage

of the crop's cultural and physical malleability to incorporate it into their own changing ways of life as they migrated throughout North America. "Maize" came to mean different things to different tribes, who labeled it with unique names, prepared it in specific ways, and imbued it with particular spiritual connotations. Broad patterns persisted, but specific transformations multiplied.<sup>5</sup> The English settlers who spread throughout the Bay Colony in the seventeenth century simply furthered this ongoing process of (agri)cultural manipulation and incorporation. Like the Native groups in their midst, they negotiated this foreign grain and made it their own. Several steps—some consciously undertaken, others unthinking—comprised this process.

## From Maize to Corn

The most consciously executed move was a name change. "The corne which was used in New England before the English inhabited any of those parts," John Winthrop Jr. explained to London's Royal Society, "is called by the Natives there Weachim, and is the same which has been known by the name of Mays in some southern parts of America." Neither name would suffice for the English settlers, however, and they immediately familiarized the crop by re-naming it "Indian corn." In England, the term "corn" referred to any cereal grain, particularly the staple grain of a given area, and was most often applied to wheat. By co-opting the foreign grain under a more familiar rubric—a trend similarly evident in their re-naming of rivers, bays, and peninsulas—English settlers began the process of colonizing what Betty Fussell refers to as an "alien corn."<sup>6</sup>

But the name change was just a symbolic start. In a less overt but more effective tactic, Bay Colonists disassociated maize from the prevailing Native belief in a natural right to land use and reconceptualized it in terms of a civil rights-based system of ownership. A natural rights approach supported an arrangement whereby, according to Winthrop Jr., "men held the earth in common [with] every man sowing and feeding where he pleased." It was, in other words, a conceptualization commensurate with Native American agricultural techniques, characterized as they were by cyclical mobility, usufruct rights, and a sense of communal ownership. Imposing a civil right of ownership, however, the English sowed and reaped maize, or Indian corn, under the general notion that, as the minister John Cotton explained, "In a vacant soyle, hee that taketh possession of it, and bestoweth culture and husbandry upon it, his Right it is." Land, as the English defined it, did not attain legal actuality with immediate use, but rather with permanent improvement. This distinction proved to be the hinge

# Repast

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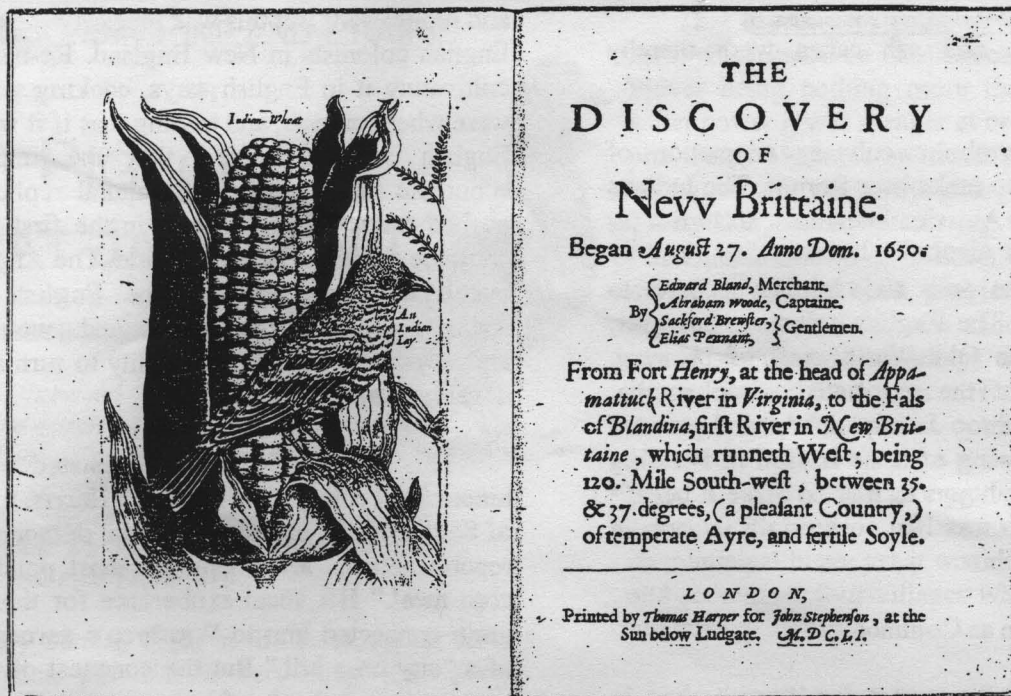


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Title and facing pages of Edward Bland's 1651 book of observations of the colony of Virginia. Note that maize is labeled "Indian wheat" in the frontispiece.

Courtesy of  
William L. Clements  
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upon which the English duplicitously "bought" land from the Native Americans, and it thereby served as the pivotal tenet behind the larger English ideology of conquest.<sup>7</sup>

This intellectual and legal imposition nurtured a more appropriate context for Anglicizing the methods through which maize was grown, prepared, and traded, thus further aiding the cultural quest to overcome the stigma it carried. Because legal right to land required "improvements," as the English believed, families instinctively built fences and mills, roads and carts, barns and lean-tos. Although entirely familiar to the English, these improvements imposed a radically new domestic productive infrastructure on the landscape and, as a result, enabled the English to incorporate maize into their larger Anglicizing mission.

### Regimenting the Soil

Winthrop Jr.'s speech to the Royal Society on "Indian corn" offers telling insight into this subtle cultural process. Whereas Native Americans planted maize in smaller patches of unbounded land, the English set it in more traditional enclosed fields, "secured from cattle," and "in rows at equall distance every way about five or six foote asunder." The Natives, Winthrop observed, "commonly thresh it out as they gather it, and dry it well upon Matts in the sun, and then bestow in holes in the ground." The English, in contrast, "lay the ears thin in their chambers and garretts." While Native Americans "maketh a little hill like hopp hills" around each stalk, "the English have found out an easier way of raising Quantity of that Corne by the help of the Plough." Native Americans

might have planted squash and pumpkins among the maize stalks but, while many English occasionally did the same, more often than not they "sprinkle Turnep-seed between the hills." Finally, whereas after harvest the "Indian women make baskets" with the dried stalkes, the English found them "good Fodder for Cattle."<sup>8</sup> Both approaches to growing and preparing maize had their virtues and vices, and food historians have dutifully threshed them out. However, the existence and perpetuation of the distinctions themselves, I would argue, deserve the most reflection.

Preparation of maize reiterated this Anglicizing theme. Native Americans processed maize through a variety of methods, but, as Winthrop Jr. observed, "a very common way of dressing it is by parching it among the ashes." Treatment with ash, lime or some other alkali, a process known as *nixtamalization*, removed the translucent pericarp, rendered maize softer to grind, and enhanced the protein value for humans. Winthrop Jr. accordingly recognized this cooking method as the foundation for "a strengthening and wholesome diet," but, concerning English adoption of the practice, he noted that, "The English sometimes for novelty will procure some of this to be made by Indian Women." More regularly, however, they Anglicized maize preparation by "making flower of it being Ground in mills as other Corn." With this "flower," they further diluted the native cultural implications of maize by "mixing half, or a third parte, more or less of rye or wheat-meale... and then they make it up into loaves." The gluten content of these Old World additives allowed yeasts to form air pockets during the cooking process. The result was a loaf that could be dignified with the term

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# AN ALIEN CORN (continued from previous page)

"bread"; corn pone and ash cakes were thereby avoided.

An especially symbolic culinary adaptation of maize was the effort to make beer from it. The Indians of Central and South America knew how to turn a jar of corn pulp into an alcoholic beverage, *chicha*, by chewing some of the pulp and spitting it back to initiate fermentation. The English colonists, however, brought to maize the Old World craft of brewing, complete with all of the associated paraphernalia. "They mash it," Winthrop Jr. explained, "and proceed every way about brewing of it, as is used in Brewing Beere of malt, adding hopps to it as to make it beer."<sup>9</sup> The malting of maize was like outfitting a sachem in britches and a cotton shirt.

## Corn as Commodity

The final, and perhaps most significant, tactic in the cultural campaign to Anglicize maize had nothing to do with growing or processing it. Historians have long noted the "commodification of corn," and they have appropriately described the process of extricating maize from a Native American system of barter and tribute and placing it within an English market-oriented economic context. Few, however, have acknowledged the full extent of this commodification.

The English not only attached a cash value to maize as they traded it within New England and throughout the colonies, but they went a step further and actually established financial arrangements that equated maize and money. In a frontier economy short on hard currency, Indian corn essentially became cash. We thus find citizens paying taxes at "the corn rate," legal settlements requiring that the loser pay his opponent in Indian corn, and commercial farmers charging interest to be paid in Indian corn. Indian corn could now buy wheat, or a plow, or a bull, or wood to build a fence. It could, in other words, be traded to establish the familiar English way of life.<sup>10</sup> By the end of the seventeenth century, maize had become corn, and corn greased the wheels of an economic and cultural transition that made New England finally look like a mirror reflection of the Mother Country.

As indicated, "successful" incorporation of maize into an English cultural framework reflected thousands of years of Native American adaptations, but the English formula had a more far-reaching consequence. Native Americans might have continually instilled maize with new meanings as they migrated throughout the Americas, but, as far as we know, their cultural manipulations of the grain never supported an ideology of conquest whose logic demanded constant expansion

and replication. But this was precisely the case with the English colonists in New England. Re-naming maize, cultivating it in English ways, cooking with it as if it were wheat or malt, and trading it as if it were cash, the English settlers insured that the imperatives of economic development and cultural replication which pushed them out of England in the first place would continue apace in the New World. The Anglicization of maize not only enabled the English to survive settlement as English men and women, but it underwrote their continual ability to turn survival into development.

This legacy of conquest persisted well into the nineteenth century. Joel Chandler Harris, the chronicler of Southern life, claimed that "real democracy and real republicanism... are among the most potent results of corn meal." His vocal exuberance for this chameleon grain connected him to Winthrop's earnest prediction of a "city on a hill." But the conquest of corn had its cost, and we get a brief but poignant glimpse of it in the Narragansett sachem Miantonomo's prophetic admonishment to his people in 1642, just as the English began the complex process of Anglicization: "We shall all be starved."<sup>11</sup>

## NOTES

1. John Frederick Martin, *Profits in the Wilderness* (Chapel Hill, 1991), pp. 1-128; Daniel Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen* (Chapel Hill, 1994), p. 13-77.
2. Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *New England's First Generation* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 12-47; Roger Thompson, *Mobility and Migration* (Amherst, 1994), pp. 29-170.
3. Gerard's speech is excerpted in Fulmer Mood, "John Winthrop, Jr. On Indian Corn," *New England Quarterly* v.10 (1937), p.123. On differing cultural perceptions of maize see William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York, 1983), pp. 34-46.
4. Mood, p. 123.
5. Betty Fussell, "Translating Maize into Corn: The Transformation of America's Native Grain," *Social Research*, v. 66 (Spring 1999), pp. 58-63; Fussell, *The Story of Corn* (New York, 1999), pp. 19-25.
6. Fussell, *The Story of Corn*, p. 19.
7. Cronon, pp. 54-82; Fussell, "Translating Maize into Corn," p. 54.
8. Winthrop Jr.'s speech is reprinted in Mood, pp. 125-135.
9. Mood, pp. 131-132.
10. George F. Dow, *The Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County*, v. I-VIII (Boston, 1911-1916); the trading of corn is well documented in various unpublished account books housed at the Phillips Library, of the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, MA.
11. Chandler quote is from Fussell, *The Story of Corn*, p. 221; Miantonomo's is from Cronon, p. 162.



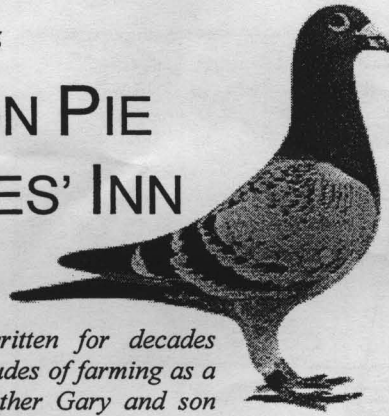
# WISCONSIN PINE AND PRAIRIE



## PIGEON PIE AT JAMES' INN

by Justin Isherwood

*Justin Isherwood has written for decades about the details and attitudes of farming as a way of life. With his brother Gary and son Isaac, he grows vegetables on an irrigated plot of 900 acres of glacial sands, woods and creeks that his family has farmed for five generations near Plover, WI.*



Every Sunday night at the hotel, James served pigeon pie. For a very long time people assumed it was prairie chicken. It wasn't. Some thought leghorn or bantam. It was not. Passenger pigeon? Not exactly. Was none other than the rock dove, the maligned, shot-at, discourteous, befouling, statue-hating rock dove allowed thence to dine, free of charge, from the next-over township. These sainted emissaries who come home at the darkening to settle in the roost, regurge their kit for the young, who seemed suddenly to disappear at the time they too were ready to fly.

"Keeping the trade," as was the term, at a country hotel required the application of the sincerest art form. It didn't so much matter if the beds were soft or uncrowded. The outhouse didn't need a whirlpool, nor did the washroom require lavender-scented soap. What was implicit to keeping the trade was good board. A roadside hotel that could not attend the stomach of the traveler in the most devoted way was bound to fail.

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When James, the great great great grandfather, opened his hotel on the Post Road in 1855, it followed a well known pattern. The original road serving Stevens Point angled north from Almond crossing the intermodal prairie, at Keene followed the east embrasure of the moraine along what is now Shady Road, connecting beyond with Airline Road. (Airline, a phrase much used by Meriwether Lewis in his journal, was a surveyor's expression for a trace so precise as to follow a straight line drawn in the air.) The objective of Airline Road was the ford of the Big Plover and the Whiting sawmill. To this simple geometry were added the complications of Springville, Rushville and Algernon on the nether side of the Little Plover.

That Plover ever came to be inhabited is curious, for it was located on no distinctive resource. The Little Plover being nothing more than a minor creek, for water power it was meager at best compared to the sure providence available on the saults of the Wisconsin. In hindsight one can only guess it was the habitat of Plover that proved interesting to the pioneer. East of Plover, also known as Stanton, between it and the old moraine, was an open prairie. Though prairie is an inexact term: the soil was sandy, well-drained, some would say droughty. Perhaps this is why it was open ground before the logger arrived. To the early settler the prospect of a natural open area was remarkable. Here were solved his twin malcontents: to find a clear place, away from the gloomy woods, that was not also soggy. If Plover's prairie seems little cause to advance its municipal hope, yet it was enough to establish three and sometimes four villages whose requirements were not terribly high.

At this point James staded a parcel of Section 1 four miles beyond Rushville, and another three miles beyond the toll road that wandered south of that community for no particular reason. He established the site of his hostel equidistant between the Coulthurst Innhouse and that of the Moore house two miles beyond. Between Almond and Rushville were something like a dozen places to over-night travelers, to refresh the horses and take supper. The route south of Stanton quickly dislocated the purpose served by Airline Road, and James was in business on this highway for as long as there were stagecoaches, freight wagons, and farmers wandering off to the market square. A situation he believed would last a hundred years: even if the railroad came to Plover, he reckoned he could always count on the horse trade. James did not know of "internal combustion" other than the kind of cookery practiced at some of the so-called hotels spread across the hinterlands.

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The secret of the frontier hostel was the promise of succulence without undue expense, a succulence that fit like an iron clamp on the brain of a teamster who stopped for supper. In the godforsaken hind-end of the piney woods this was no easy formula. James was part Scots and reportedly some small part English but not enough to do any damage, and knew well the shortcut to succulence. It was the same tried and true formula used by St. Columba to survive where no man by rights ought to survive, and this a preaching pilgrim kind of mannie with soft hands and over-long prayers.\* The same method known to every border and highland laird, that the true way of life was not by roast beef and suckling pig, but the methods of good St. Columba. For by his provisioning was he named, in the Latin

*continued on next page*



### PIGEON PIE *(continued from previous page)*

manner, after the peaceful dove; a mistranslation, when what was meant was the pieful dove.

Before James built the one-holer, before the horse byre, before the smokehouse, smith, coolroom, before corn crib and granary, did he before all else build the dovecote. A simple shed into which holes were bored, a cobble floor to ward off skunks and possums, add then but a cage of unflown squabs, who ever after will return to this roost while feeding without chore from the next-over township. A hundred square miles of browse, free browse, someone else's oats, seeds of the old prairie, the whole kernels left in cowpies. Never did his neighbors who faithfully sowed their oats and rye and barley guess why the stand wasn't good. The pigeons thrived despite drought, winter, wet spring, feeding off every barnyard and chicken coop, off the gardens of lawyers and ladies alike.

Pigeon pie, said in the old way, is *colm pithean*. A pie crust filled with potatoes, onions, carrots, wild mushrooms (when in season) and a gravy, over this the breast of the unflighted pigeon is divided and with the

previous assembly entombed. A proper pigeon pie is somewhere between sodden and moist, the gravy so ample it must be taken up with a quarter loaf of bread. Was this pie known to lay down the mane of a teamster who walked thirty miles that very day in a mud that overwhelmed the axle nuts.

Eventually the automobile killed off James and his hotel; it was replaced by Joe Fabish's barbecue as served every Sunday a bit ways down the road. Stevens Point had a root beer stand, and two others for custard. It was time for pigeon pie to die. ■

\* (Editor's note) The saint was born in Ireland in 521 with the given name Crimthann, "fox." According to legend, the holy man was still only a child when he acquired the prophetic nickname Columba, Latin for "dove" or "pigeon" (symbol of the Holy Spirit) and a name often gaelicized to Colum, Colm, or Colmán. A battle in 561 led to the priest's excommunication, and with 12 followers he sailed eastward *pro Christo peregrinari volens* (wishing to be a pilgrim for Christ). The monastery he founded on the rocky islet of Iona, off the coast of Scotland, systematically converted the Picts and other Scottish peoples to Christianity. St. Columba's death on 9 June 597, the first Sunday after Whitsuntide, is still marked in Scotland and Ireland with an annual feast on the 9th of June.



## Pigeon Pie

From Lizzie Boyd, ed., *British Cookery: A Compete Guide to Culinary Practice in England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales*. Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1976.

This traditional pie is first cooked with a suet crust which is later broken up and pushed in with the meat and then covered with puff pastry. The suet crust was originally known as dumpling crust and takes the place of potatoes or bread for mopping up the gravy.

- 4 pigeons
- 2 cloves
- 1 ½ lb. shoulder steak of beef
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 crushed clove garlic (optional)
- 4 oz. sliced shallots or onions
- Salt and pepper
- 6 oz. small mushrooms
- ½ lb. diced bacon trimmings
- ¾ lb. savory suet pastry
- 1 ¼ lb. puff pastry
- 1 egg

Makes 6-8 portions.

Oven: 350° F., about 1½ hours.

Joint the cleaned pigeons and put the trimmings in a pan with water and cloves to make stock. Cut the beef into 1 in. cubes, mix with the bay leaf, garlic and shallots and put in a greased 3-4 pint pie dish. Put the pigeon joints on top of the beef, season with salt and pepper and top with mushrooms and bacon. Pour over enough strained pigeon stock to come halfway up the dish.

Cover with the suet pastry, pressing it down flat over the meat inside the pie dish; put on a lid and bake for 1 hour. Remove from the oven, cut the suet crust into squares and pack down amongst the pigeon meat.

Fill up the dish with stock and cover the pie with puff pastry; brush with beaten egg and bake until well-risen and brown, after 20-30 minutes.



cardamom

## Spicy Cookies with Cardamom

Member Julie Lewis baked these cookies to accompany Alice Arndt's April talk on *Seasoning Savvy* (see page 8). Recipe is courtesy of Alice Arndt.

- 8 Tablespoons (4 oz.) unsalted butter
- ½ cup sugar (less 1 Tablespoon if topping with fruit)
- 1 egg
- ½ teaspoon ground cardamom
- 1⅔ cup sifted flour
- pinch of salt
- fruit preserves (optional)

Makes about 3 dozen cookies.

Oven: 300° F., about 15-20 mins.

In a large bowl, cream the butter and sugar. Add the egg and beat well.

Sift the flour, cardamom and salt together. Add to the bowl in two halves, combining well with the butter mixture after each addition. Gather up the dough, and chill briefly in the refrigerator.

Roll out the dough ¼ inch thick on a floured board. Cut out circles with a cookie cutter, and transfer the circles to a greased cookie sheet, leaving a little space between them. If using preserves, make an indentation in the middle of each circle with the bowl of a small spoon, and carefully fill it with a dab of the preserves.

Bake for 15-20 mins., until the cookies are just getting golden at the edges. Cool on a rack. Remember, the preserves will be very HOT when just out of the oven.

### Optional Spices:

This is a cookie to have fun with. Be creative! Spice is the variety of life. Here are some suggestions:

- ❑ Sift with the flour, cardamom and salt one of the following (don't omit the cardamom: it goes with everything):
  - ½ teaspoon cinnamon
  - ¼ teaspoon ground ginger
  - ½ teaspoon Chinese 5-spice powder
  - ½ teaspoon garam masala
- ❑ Or, use vanilla sugar in place of regular sugar in the recipe.
- ❑ Or, before chilling the dough, shape it into a log about 1½ inches in diameter. Then, instead of rolling it out on a board, coat it thickly with one of the following:
  - anise seeds
  - sesame seeds
 Then slice the log crosswise into circles, about ½ inch thick. Lay the circles on a greased cookie sheet with space between them, flattening each slightly with two fingers.

Bake as above. Let me know what other flavors you come up with for these cookies.

## CHAA PROGRAMS EXPLORE MICHIGAN, MEXICO, MOROCCO & THE SPICE TRADE

Our CHAA agenda for the first half of 2000 included a Jan. 16 talk on Moroccan foodways by member Fran Lyman, a Feb. 20 tour of Katherine's Catering by owner Katherine Farrell, a Mar. 19 talk on American Spoon Foods® by owner Justin Rashid, an Apr. 16 talk by author Alice Arndt on her new book *Seasoning Savvy*, and a May 21 talk on Mexican vanilla by Ari Weinzwieg, co-owner of Zingerman's Delicatessen. Following are brief summaries of the talks.

### From a Simple Tajine Pot

Dressed in a *djellabah*, Fran Lyman conveyed to us the affection she has acquired for Morocco, a country where cuisine and other aspects of culture remain close to the land. In 1998 and 1999, Fran worked with the U.S. Peace Corps at a university library in northern Morocco.

Moroccan foodways, she observed, tend to be fairly simple but wonderfully satisfying, with cooks adept at combining not only fresh and seasonal ingredients but also the diverse cultural influences shaping the cuisine: Berber, Arab, Persian, West African, Iberian, and French. Markets display a staggering variety of olives, dates (over 200 types, with harvest in October), citrus and other fruits, spices, grains (chiefly wheat, millet and maize), bread and pasta.

Until the 1950s, the rural north was still a semifeudal society dominated by local warlords. The French colonists left behind some basic infrastructure in 1956, but poverty is still widespread, with unemployment at 50% in many areas. Home cooks rely on small butane stoves, with pressure cookers often used to conserve fuel when preparing beans or meats. Lamb and other red meat is costly, typically used as a flavoring agent especially for guests; even fish is expensive, eaten but one day/week in the town where Fran stayed, far from the coast. The government subsidizes prices of some vegetable oils— alas, not olive oil. (Fran's report on olive pressing in Ouezzane— filed from overseas— appeared in our Summer 1999 issue.) Bread dough is still made every morning as part of household chores, then brought to a privately owned community oven for baking; but yogurt, *couscous* (fine semolina pasta) and other traditional labor-intensive home products are increasingly becoming commercial commodities purchased at market. The masses might enjoy a *tajine* stew daily but the more expensive *couscous* only on Friday, holy day. Food rituals are often tied to Islamic customs, from the all-engulfing *Ramadan* (fasting month) or *eid* (religious festival) to the more private celebration of marriage or circumcision.

### Honest Preserves

The son of a Lebanese merchant and Irish-German farmgirl, American Spoon Foods co-founder Justin Rashid cultivated a boyhood hobby picking and selling berries from his parents' summer homestead in Petoskey, northern Michigan. After brief acting careers, he and his wife settled in Michigan, selling fine foods as a sideline and eventually a mainstay. A partnership with chef Larry Forgione, supplying fruit products and other items to the River Café (Brooklyn, NY), led the duo to launch American Spoon Foods in 1982. A *New York Times* article the following year catapulted them

to fame as a mail-order business. From its headquarters in Petoskey, the company manufactures over 200 fruit products and other specialty foods. With a niche tied to high-quality, authentic ingredients, its annual sales of \$6 million amount to roughly 1% those of Ohio-born jam giant J. M. Smucker Co.

"Spoon foods" is an apt label for preserves which, with less added sugar and other solids, are fluid enough to call for a spoon instead of a knife. The company's 1999-2000 catalog includes 35 pages of products and recipes. Sources of inspiration have been as near at hand as classic fruit pies popular in resorter-friendly local diners, or as far away as a recipe for colonial American cranberry-plum catsup with a Far East influence. Northern Michigan supplies the company with Early Glow strawberries, Bluecrop blueberries, and other berries, as well as stone fruit such as Red Haven peaches and the famous Montmorency tart cherries. Rashid recently discovered wild plums and crabapples in Michigan, and he pioneered another preserve that uses Apricot No. 7, first grown in this state for Gerber Products of Fremont. Other high-volume fruit needs are satisfied by other states: Oregon for cultivated berries, California for citrus and fresh Black Mission figs. The company taps not only traditional cooking methods (simmering small batches in copper kettles, etc.) but local expertise: Finnish-American women pick wild thimbleberries from the shores of Lake Superior, and baskets are crafted from birch bark harvested by a fishing family in the Upper Peninsula.

Cooking has become such an infrequent pleasure in modern life that it is by far easiest for the company to sell ready-to-use or ready-to-eat products: preserves, salsas, grill marinades, tapenades. Despite marketing via retail outlets, airline and other food services, mail order and the Internet, the main customer base remains narrow: people who enjoy foods that seem "new" because they rescue lost heritage.

### Racy Secrets, Spicy Exposés

Proper spicing can be a complex affair, and too often the home cook's understanding has been garbled by misinformation. Alice Arndt decided to help sift through this "garble." In India and elsewhere, she noted, sifting debris from spices is still known as "garbling." Interestingly, the etymology retraces an important spice route to medieval England. The Latin word *cribellum* ("little sieve") appearing in learned manuscripts was rendered by Arabs as *ghirbal*; that term followed sea lanes to Italy as *garbellare* ("to sift") and was thence traded into Middle English as *garbelen*.

Arndt, an independent food historian and scholar, is a founding member of the Houston Culinary Historians and the Historic Foodways Group of Austin. Her book *Seasoning Savvy: How to Cook with Herbs, Spices, and Other Flavorings* (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, 1999) discusses over 100 spices and blends like Chinese Five-Spice Powder, Indian Garam Masala, Lebanese Za'atar, and Moroccan Ras el Hanout. Arndt helped us distinguish true from impostor varieties of bay, cinnamon and other spices. Among the samples we were able to sniff, suck on or nibble

*continued on page 10*



## BOOK REVIEW

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# FILLET OF LION AND OTHER FEASTS

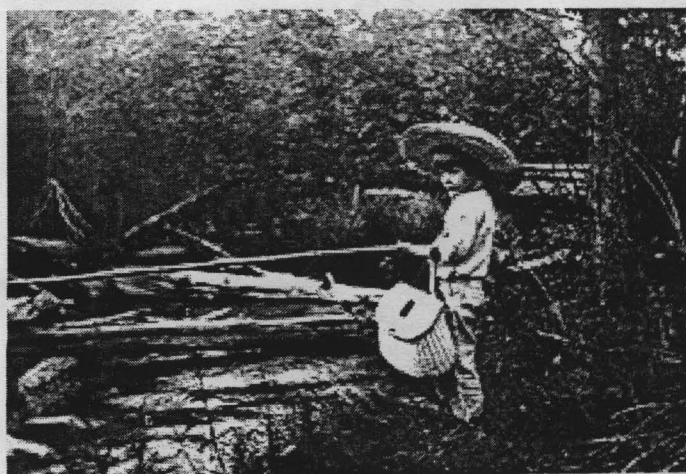
Craig Boreth,  
*The Hemingway Cookbook*  
Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1998  
224pp., \$24 cloth

by Sara Firebaugh

*CHAA member and Zingerman's Delicatessen employee Sara Firebaugh lives in Dexter with her husband. She has a B.A. in creative writing from the University of Michigan, and hopes to pursue a master's degree in food studies at New York University. Sara reviewed Food in Russian History and Culture in our Winter 2000 issue.*

My husband looked at me dubiously when I served him the first meal prepared from *The Hemingway Cookbook*. "Pork and Beans and Spaghetti" involved opening a can of pork and beans and one of spaghetti (I used Spaghettios), dumping them into a pan to heat, and enjoying with lots of ketchup squeezed on top. I was actually grateful for the addition of the ketchup (not usually one of my favorite condiments) because it added a spicy, tomatoey flavor that the Spaghettios definitely lacked. The book said that this particular meal is best "when eaten alone in the bush by a favorite trout stream after a long journey." Maybe that was the problem. Ernest Hemingway is remembered for his love of nature, of hunting and fishing and safaris. I'm not. (Just ask my husband about our honeymoon camping trip.)

Fortunately, there is much in *The Hemingway Cookbook* for people like me, for whom the romance of the outdoors is much more pleasantly enjoyed indoors (when reading a Hemingway novel, for example). The book, by Craig Boreth, includes a wide range of food and drink recipes from Hemingway's life and his writings. The recipes are collected from a variety of sources: restaurants where Hemingway dined, interviews with friends and family members, and traditional, regional cookbooks of the times. There are plenty of quotes and background information on the dishes, many of which made me want to run to my bookshelves and reread. Wonderful photographs show Hemingway as a child and as an adult, here wading in a trout stream, here with a defeated lion, here in the midst of a smiling group, always embracing life. And



Ernest Hemingway spent his first 16 summers at his family's cottage on Walloon Lake, near Petoskey in northern Michigan. In this photo from the summer of 1904, he is fishing in nearby Horton Creek. The young boy showed promise as an angler from the first day his dad took him fishing—his third birthday, on November 7, 1902. "He knows when he gets a bite," his mother reported, "and lands them all himself." (Photo courtesy of the Ernest Hemingway Collection, John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, MA.)

although Boreth makes clear in the introduction that this is not a biography, there is enough biographical information thrown in to make sense of the different cuisines and locales included in the book.

Organized for the most part chronologically, *The Hemingway Cookbook* explores foods from the different cities and countries in which Hemingway lived and visited, starting with his childhood summers in northern Michigan, then moving to Italy, France, Spain, Florida and Cuba. There are also wild game and western recipes from his African safaris and hunts in Idaho. Hemingway's instructions for preparing fillet of lion appeared in a *Sports Illustrated* article that also included a dish by President Eisenhower. The recipe begins, "First obtain your lion. Skin him out and remove the two strips of tenderloin from either side of the backbone. These should hang overnight in a tree out of reach of hyenas and should be wrapped in cheesecloth to prevent them being hit by blowflies."

Most of the other recipes are a little easier to follow. "Potatoes in Garlic Mayonnaise," a summery potato salad with a light dressing, had a lemony bite up front, then filled my mouth with a rounded garlic flavor. I used the same mayonnaise recipe for "Fried Fish Tapas," fried squares of firm white fish (I tried talapia) dipped in mayonnaise and served on lightly fried baguette slices. "Cervelas with Mustard Sauce" was another simple and excellent dish. I browned the garlic sausages (from Sparrow Meat Market on Fifth Avenue in Ann Arbor) and topped them with the mild-

*continued on next page*

# HEMINGWAY COOKBOOK *(continued from previous page)*

ly spicy sauce made with Dijon mustard, white wine, lemon and vinegar. A "Potato Omelette Sandwich" had just enough eggs to hold it together and cooked slowly on the stove. ("Remember: Spanish cuisine is a cuisine of patience.") I especially loved the crispy ring of egg around the edge and will definitely prepare the sandwich again, without the bread! I also tried "Cornish Pasties," which were basic and hearty, although I enjoy mine with more gravy.

Other outstanding main dishes include "Hot Vegetable Soup," made with cabbage, leeks, and green beans; "Trout Cooked with Cured Ham," in which mint leaves are rolled in slices of prosciutto and stuffed inside the trout as it fries; and a recipe for Chop Suey from Hemingway's fourth wife, Mary. There are not many desserts in the book, but an apple tart tasted simply of baked apples and buttery crust (I used a normal rolling pin on the dough, not the empty bottle that was recommended, but it didn't seem to taint the final results). And "Coconut Ice Cream" had a delicate and tropical flavor that we all (even my friend who doesn't like coconut) enjoyed. The last two chapters of the book describe and define the wines and other alcoholic beverages that Hemingway would have chosen to accompany a meal, or for their own attributes, including several little-known drinks and wines from the regions in which he lived.

Besides the fun of trying the recipes and knowing that a legendary writer once ate the same meals, *The Hemingway Cookbook* is also a delight to read on its own. Boreth does a wonderful job of balancing the legend with reality, often tossing humor into the directions or descriptions. The potato omelette, for example, is finished when its center feels like your forearm: "Of course, if you have manly Hemingway forearms, choose a slightly fleshier spot." Foods adapted from Hemingway novels often refer to the fictional characters who ate them: "Boise's Avocado" feeds "3 Humans and 1 Cat." And Boreth of course realizes that many of his readers will never prepare many of the dishes included, yet he tries to make them seem accessible, if only to allow us to share more deeply in the illusion. "Octopus Vinaigrette" ends with this note: "And, although you didn't hear it from me, and I'll deny it if confronted, the canned octopus in olive oil that you can get in your local supermarket is an adequate substitute in this dish."

Overall, Boreth communicates sheer joy and passion for this food of Ernest Hemingway, as well as a deep respect for the artist. ■

# CHAA PROGRAMS *(continued from page 8)*

were the "seeds" (actually dried fruits) of caraway, cumin, anise and fennel. Various types of woody bark or roots are made into licorice, cassia and cinnamon; in ancient Rome, Cato the Elder (c. 200 BCE) wrote of scraping the bark of the bay tree—nowadays we prefer the leaves or berries. Guatemala has emerged as leading producer of cardamom, a member of the ginger family whose seed pods make it the third most expensive spice after saffron and vanilla.

Closely related to cardamom is another spice we tasted, Grains of Paradise, which helped shape world history from their West African homeland. With a pepperiness rounded out, as the name suggests, by other flavors and fragrances, these seeds became the rage in medieval Morocco and Europe. Still used by the Yoruba and Ibo peoples in daily cooking and sacred ritual, the grains are also called *atare* (from the Yoruba), alligator pepper, Melegueta pepper (after Málaga, a Spanish port where they were traded) and Guinea grains (from the land where the Portuguese first encountered them). *The Forme of Cury* (1381) called the fig-sized pods "the greater cardamoms," and Taillevent used their grains in his *sauce cameline* (c. 1375). Trade was so heavy that the area just north of the Ivory Coast became known as the Grain or Pepper Coast. Vasco da Gama's circumnavigation of Africa (1497-99) led to Portuguese control of Asian black pepper; the world market for Melegueta pepper soon collapsed and is only now being revived.

## Magic from an Orchid

After Cortés the Conqueror landed in 1519 in what is now Veracruz, on the Gulf coast of Mexico, his men watched Aztec natives prepare a beverage from two exotic "beans": cacao and vanilla. Spaniards soon began importing both seed pods to duplicate the drink. Not until 1602 did Hugh Morgan, apothecary to Queen Elizabeth I of England, suggest using vanilla independently of chocolate. French colonists transplanted vanilla vines to Réunion and Mauritius in 1827 and to Madagascar c. 1840, but these bore no fruit; it was discovered that a bee and hummingbird indigenous to Mexico are the only natural pollinators. In 1841 Edmond Albius, a Réunion ex-slave, rediscovered the Veracruz method of hand-pollination that is still used commercially.

After Ari Weinzwieg and his *conquistadores* landed in Veracruz in 1999, they made a beeline to Papantla, a town once wealthy from being the center of vanilla production. Farmers of the Totonac tribe work the more or less wild stands of vanilla vines in jungles outside town, hand-pollinating the orchids over a period of 4-6 weeks every spring and returning 9 months later to harvest the pods. These have no flavor nor aroma until cured by a *beneficiador*, whose weeks of alternately sun-drying the pods outdoors and night-sweating them indoors releases the vanillin and other essential oils. Curing is typically a town-based enterprise separate from jungle cultivation. Ari's team visited town *beneficiador* Heriberto Larios, from a Totonac family. His combination of traditional technique and clever innovation is helping restore local vanilla quality, which he said had suffered greatly when the oil industry moved in after WW1 and began to draw people off the land. ■



# MORSELS & TIDBITS

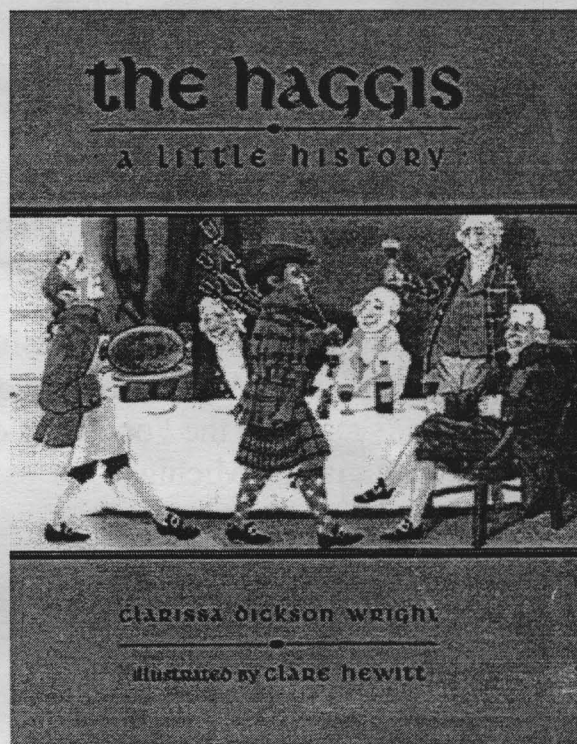
*Cognoscenti* whose appetites for Tuscany were whetted by our July 23 picnic might want to look into the **Tuscan Summer Celebration** organized by Zingerman's Delicatessen for Thursday, Aug. 10 at 7-9 p.m. in Ann Arbor's Barclay Park. Call 734-327-0400 for information. A report on our own picnic will appear in a future issue.

On Saturday, Sept. 23, the Golden Ball Tavern Museum and the Massachusetts Historical Society will co-sponsor **New England Taverns: A Symposium on Tavern Culture From the Mid-18<sup>th</sup> to the Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century**. For information contact Joan Bines, Golden Ball Tavern Museum, P.O. Box 223, Weston, MA 02493 or telephone 781-894-1751 or e-mail [joanb5@aol.com](mailto:joanb5@aol.com).

**Timothy Morton** and **Denise Gigante** invite contributions to a book they will edit, *Eating Romanticism*. The volume will help define and advance the burgeoning study of eating in the Romantic period, encompassing everything from high philosophy to the streets of Smithfield market. Proposals are due by Oct. 15, 2000. For more information, contact *Repast* editor Randy Schwartz.

We are pleased to report that *Food Arts* magazine gave its Silver Spoon Award for June 2000 to our founding member, **Jan Longone**. The award recognizes "sterling performance" in the culinary arts, in Jan's case "her scholarly determination to preserve and honor American culinary literature." A write-up by Meryle Evans in the New York-based monthly remarked on the Longones' mail-order bookstore as well as Jan's ongoing work investigating, curating, judging and consulting about cookbooks and other aspects of gastronomy, noting that her "meticulous research and keen judgment, combined with a gift for making food history come alive, have made Longone an invaluable resource."

We take note here of some recent publications in the regional food history of America and the British Isles. **Trevor Hickman's** *The History of the Melton Mowbray Pork Pie* (Stroud, Gloucestershire UK: Sutton Pubs., 1997; 160pp., \$17.95 paper) is part of the "Best of the British in Old Photographs" book series. Pork pie, with roots back in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, was a well-established favorite of British Midlands hunters and publicans when John Dickinson helped spread its fame far and wide by setting up a pork pie concession at the Melton Mowbray railway station in 1840s Leicestershire. These 250 photos, some older than a century, were gathered from local and family archives and are here augmented with recipes and Hickman's survey of history and ingredients. Earlier in the same series, Hickman celebrated another famous product of Leicestershire in *The History of Stilton Cheese* (1995). **Clarissa Dickson Wright**, the surviving half of television's "Two Fat Ladies," has authored *The Haggis: A Little History* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Pubs., 1998; 60 pp., \$8.95 paper). She seasons this little cookbook with the background knowledge and gentle humor of an insider. Haggis, the national dish of Scotland, arose from humble origins as a spiced mixture of oatmeal, minced sheep organs and suet, boiled as a pudding in the sheep's own stomach.



From our own side of the Atlantic, **Dean Merchant** brings us *The Lore of the Fried Clam and History of the Soft-Shell Clam Industry* (Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Pubs., 1999; 160pp. \$15.00 paper). Merchant's grasp of biology and his digging through archives enable him to delve into clams' role in the Native American diet, their use as pig fodder in the Revolutionary era, and the origins of fried clams in the 1840s. He also taps the memories of crusty old clam diggers and restaurant owners, and supplies us photos, recipes, and tips about clam eateries and festivals. His book takes its place beside Kathy Neustadt's out-of-print *Clambake: A History and Celebration of an American Tradition* (1992). **Linda Elisabeth Beattie**, associate professor of English at Elizabethtown Community College in Kentucky, edited *Savory Memories* (University Press of Kentucky, 1998; 184 pp., \$21.50 cloth), a collection of 22 nostalgic essays on Kentucky dishes, with accompanying recipes. Many of the essays reveal intimate personal recollections or a raucous sense of humor. Samples include Ronni Lundy on "The Tao of Cornbread," Billy C. Clark on cracklin' cornbread and leatherbritches, George Ella Lyon on fried corn, Shirley Williams on dried apple stack cake, and Lee Pennington's homage to snow cream ("When Angels Comb Their Hair"). Food historian **Jacqueline Williams** has mined diaries, letters, cookbooks, women's magazines, business journals and newspapers to research *The Way We Ate: Pacific Northwest Cooking, 1843-1900* (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1996; 240pp., \$29.95 cloth, \$18.95 paper). In her book, we learn about the foodways of pioneer families who had followed the Oregon Trail, and we see how their customs were rapidly transformed by the settling and urbanization of the West. Included are hunting and fishing, the uses of farm products, drying, pickling and preserving, pantries and root cellars, and a whole chapter on "Improvising in the Kitchen." ■

Ann Arbor District Library Attn. Steve  
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