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Repast

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IMMIGRANT HUNGARIAN JEWISH MEMORIES



GRANDMOTHER ROSA'S GOULASH

by Elissa Karg

Ms. Karg lives in Detroit, where she writes regularly about food and dining for the Metro Times.

There is a photograph of my maternal grandparents, Rosa and Abraham Schwartz, over the mantle. It was taken in 1903, just after they emigrated from Hungary. My grandfather is a handsome man with a waxed moustache and a wingtip collar. My grandmother glows. Her frizzy hair is parted down the middle, it flares into two half moons that frame her face, and is tamed in the back with a bun. Every time I look at it, I am surprised that she is almost as tall as he is. By the time I knew her, she was small and round, soft as a pillow. Beneath the photograph are two brass candlesticks that Rosa used when she said the *kiddush* on Friday night. She would light the candles and say the prayers over a loaf of freshly baked *challah*, or braided egg bread. For that moment, the house would fall silent and Rosa was at its center. Then the Sabbath meal would begin, and she was again in the kitchen, stirring and serving and clearing and cleaning.

My grandparents were orthodox Jews who kept kosher. When they visited at our house, the two mothers—my mother and my mother's mother—would survey the pots and pans, assigning some to dairy, others to meat. I asked what they did about the plates and silverware. "She wasn't a fanatic," my mother declared.

Memories of Goulash and Paprikash

My grandmother's specialty was goulash. There were never any recipes. What I remember was a hearty beef stew, richly seasoned and colored with paprika. Potatoes, carrots and onions were cooked with the meat. The potatoes thickened the broth. For the children, she sometimes made goulash with kosher hot dogs.

REFERENCE

A scene at the corner of Elsmere Place and Southern Boulevard in the Bronx, 1946.

From the collection of
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Paprika is synonymous with Hungarian food, and it comes in six shades of sweet to spicy. As George Lang notes in his *The Cuisine of Hungary* (New York: Atheneum, 1982 and Wings Books, 1994), in 1859 two brothers in the city of Szeged invented a technique for removing the veins and seeds from the red pepper pods. This process created the mild "noble-sweet-rose" paprika, which quickly became popular. This is probably what my grandmother used, since her stews had a lot of flavor but not noticeable heat. She used enough to create a deep red color and a rich taste.

A breaded chicken that was oven-baked was acclaimed in our house because it was the only kind of chicken my father would eat. I can still see my grandmother's hands, her skin so fragile it was almost translucent, as she pressed the chicken into breadcrumbs and eggs. She baked it on a round broiler pan, the same one that we used to make bacon (of course, no one told her that).

Dinner most often began with a bowl of chicken soup. My Uncle Herbert, who was the youngest of seven children growing up in New York, remembers that Uncle Leopold, his father's brother, would come over after work to have a bowl of soup and a chicken foot before heading home. "I thought he was a classy guy because he was always wearing a tuxedo," Herbert told me. "Actually, he was a waiter." Unlaid eggs, the eggs found inside the slaughtered chicken, were also part of the soup, and a delicacy. Rosa served the soup with sliced lettuce or grated horseradish alongside.

In their last home on Elsmere Place in the Bronx, there was a cherry tree in the backyard that was used to make

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BOOK REVIEW



SOLID RUSSIAN FARE

Musya Glants and Joyce Toomre, eds.,
Food in Russian History and Culture
 Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997
 280 pp., \$17.95 paper

by Sara Firebaugh

Sara is a new member of CHAA and a recent creative writing graduate of the University of Michigan. Originally from Caro, MI, she now lives in Dexter with her husband. Ms. Firebaugh is currently employed at Zingerman's Delicatessen, and in the future she hopes to pursue a master's degree in food studies at New York University.

I remember myself— a child of the microwave oven, McDonald's, and pre-cut vegetables— hearing about bread lines in the USSR in the 1980s. It meant little to me, knowing a line for food only from the supermarket check-out lane. This collection of essays, the result of what must have been a lively conference of food historians and other scholars at Harvard University in 1993, was eye-opening to me. Although I am no longer an innocent child, I've not been exposed to the sorts of mythology and deep-rooted meanings of food that grow among a people rich with tradition and otherwise impoverished. Some of the essays could be difficult reading for someone new to food history, such as I, and are best understood after some prior exposure to the subject.

Several common themes run through these essays, including the line between food as an object and as a symbol. As Musya Glants and Joyce Toomre write in their introduction: "In fact, impervious boundaries between the actual and the symbolic roles of food do not exist. Food functions in both roles simultaneously, just as a word's multiple meanings enrich any single context."

The book opens with Snezana Tempest's look at the multiple functions and myths of the stove in the 19th-Century Russian peasant home. A grand appliance that often took up one quarter of a hut's living area, the stove's simplicity or grandeur of decoration indicated the wealth of its owner. Because nearly all foods in the Russian peasant diet (bread, porridge, soup, even fruits and vegetables) were processed in some way before consumption, the stove played a major role in food preparation and was praised domestically and abroad

as unparalleled in its utility. Besides being a cooking unit, the stove served as the heat source and ventilation for the home. Much mythology surrounded the elements of fire and water, so it is not surprising that similar superstitions were associated with the stove. Among these were the notion of the stove as a feminine object: a direct connection was drawn between human sexuality and the process of baking bread. In one wedding ritual, an unmarried man would be selected to insert the bread into the stove, ensuring fertility for the new couple. Another belief concerned the stove as mediator between life and death. Small breads shaped as ladders were sometimes placed next to a corpse to facilitate its rise to paradise. A highly symbolic practice for curing infant illnesses, called "rebaking," involved holding the baby close to the stove fire, as if to transform a formless round of dough into a healthy loaf.

The other essays likewise illuminate the intertwining of functionality and symbolism of food in Russian culture, all the while keeping a detailed timeline of national and world events. In "Forced Hunger and Rational Restraint in the Russian Peasant Diet: One Populist's Vision," Cathy A. Frierson discusses the writings of Aleksandr Nikolaevich Engelgardt for the progressive journal *Notes of the Fatherland* in the late 1800s. Exiled from St. Petersburg, the scientist and former aristocrat was astounded by the intelligent and practical view the peasants took toward their daily meals, which were economized according to the amount of labor each man would be doing that day. "If you eat potatoes, you'll make potatoes." The story of this man's personal realization that he belongs in the country, eating "solid Russian food," his shock as the poor women of the village prostituted themselves for bread during the hungry months of winter, and his impassioned *Father-*

Repast

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land articles criticizing the amorality of his former social class make this the most moving essay of the book.

Three more chapters also follow the thread of morality and consumption, from a religious perspective and from the personal views of two very influential people in the early vegetarian movement: Lev Tolstoy and activist Natalia Nordman-Severova. Tolstoy is often portrayed as an "animal rights" type of vegetarian, but in "Tolstoy's Way of No Flesh: Abstinence, Vegetarianism, and Christian Physiology," Ronald D. LeBlanc uses excerpts from the writer's novels together with oral reports from friends and family members to show that for Tolstoy, vegetarianism was not a cause in itself but one means to an end, the first step to living a moral life. Gluttony and lust were linked in Tolstoy's mind; consequently, so were animal flesh and carnal temptation, as reflected in this passage from his "The First Step":

If he earnestly and sincerely tries to lead a good life, the first thing that a man will abstain from, while fasting, will always be the use of animal food, because, not to mention the arousal of passions produced by the food, its use is directly immoral since it necessitates killing, an act that is repugnant to moral sensibility, and it is provoked only by avarice and the desire for gourmandism.

Vegetarians and literature enthusiasts will especially appreciate this thoughtful look at one of the greatest writers of the 19th Century. There are also mentions of key American figures in the health reform movement, including Michigan's own cereal magnate John Harvey Kellogg.

Nordman-Severova, who emerges in Darra Goldstein's essay as the most colorful character in the book, also appreciated the virtues of vegetarianism but had a different goal in mind: the physical salvation of the starving masses. Unlike Tolstoy, Nordman emphasized the great pleasure and energy that was to be found in a vegetarian diet, which was inexpensive and could be easily adapted by peasants. In her strictest diet, she ate only hay and grasses, making various soups from these and other items that were free for the asking, such as cucumber peelings. At weekly dinners in her home, she demonstrated the use of an ingenious two-tiered table with a giant lazy susan forming the top layer. Guests were expected to wait on themselves, as Nordman believed deeply in the emancipation of women from domestic tasks. There was no meat served, but wine ("the energy of the sun") flowed freely, another difference between Nordman and fellow vegetarian moralists who considered alcohol and spices

excessively seductive. Unfortunately, Nordman is remembered as another eccentric, and the peasant population never did embrace vegetarianism, perhaps wishing instead (as the strict rules of religious fasting began to relax) for the lavish dishes of the wealthy.

Musya Glants closes the volume with a fascinating study of food as depicted in artwork of the early 20th Century. Under Stalin, artists were carefully monitored, and only certain images could be produced. Therefore, like the numerous cookbooks that were published with seemingly no concern for the actual means of the people who would be reading them, many paintings, on the surface at least, portrayed only abundance. As the century marched on, many artists began to paint the true picture of Russian food and culture, in terms of isolated families eating meager bread, people divided by what in this country often brings us together. My regret was that not all of the paintings discussed in Glants' essay are reproduced in the book, so there is much left to the imagination. However, those that are included are powerful symbols of a country and a people still struggling with its history and mythology of food.

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GRANDMOTHER ROSA'S GOULASH (from page 1)

sour-cherry soup and wine. (For more on this celebrated cold soup see Lang, p. 174.) Leopold would surreptitiously dip into the jug of fermenting cherries that Rosa kept behind the living room door.

My very favorite childhood dinner was one I could only get from my grandmother: spaghetti and farina. When I asked my mother, Dorothy, to make it, she would say that she did not know how, but of course it was that she didn't think it was a healthy meal. I have never seen a recipe for spaghetti and farina in any cookbook, so here's how: have leftover cooked spaghetti in the fridge. Melt some butter or margarine in a frying pan, sprinkle on some cream of wheat and let it brown. Add water and salt, stir in the cold noodles and cook until the water is evaporated. It was even better when I was a kid because the farina would make occasional little lumps.

Baking Strudel for the Sabbath

There was a gas stove and a wood stove in the house on Freeman Street, where my grandmother and her family lived before moving to Elsmere Place. Rosa and her sister Mulvinea used the wood stove for their Friday baking because it was what they were used to from Europe.

Together they would roll out strudel dough on the oak table, until it covered the entire table and was translucent. "You could almost read through it," Milton, the third oldest, recalls. If the strudel developed holes during the rolling, they would gather it up and let it rest before trying again. Rosa's rolling pin was the long, tapered type.

My mother remembers that when she came home from school on Fridays, the furniture was covered with sheets. Dough for strudel and for noodles was spread out to dry. Then Rosa would sprinkle the dough with cinnamon, nuts and apples and roll it up and cut it into four loaves. Poppyseeds ground with raisins was another sweet strudel. Coppister strudel was a savory variation filled with sautéed cabbage.

Noodles were used for soup for the rest of the week, and she made something called *gumborda* which was similar to the better-known *farfel*, the tiny barley-shaped egg noodles of Yiddish immigrants.

Hungarians are famous for their cakes and tortes, but this was not my grandmother's kind of cooking. My uncles describe a coarse yeast bread called *kuchney*, which was round and twisted with cinnamon and sugar inside. *Herotzog* was a fried dough with confectioner's sugar on it. By the time I was born, my grandmother did not make sweets any more. I suspect it was because she was diabetic.

Keeping Kosher in a New World

In their native Pécs (Petsch), my grandmother's mother was a caterer. She went to the homes of the rich to prepare a

party, sometimes for a week at a time. She brought her pay home tied in a handkerchief. She would untie the knot and the coins would fall onto the kitchen table and her son-in-law would count it up.

Her son-in-law was my grandfather. When he was 13, Abraham Schwartz was apprenticed to a carpenter. It was a three-year apprenticeship if you accepted clothing as payment from the master, two years if you did not. My grandfather, noting that the master had a large family to wear out clothing, chose the two-year route. His bride-to-be was a dressmaker. Rosa had already accumulated some money when the couple decided to emigrate. The plan was for my grandfather to get established in the U.S. and then send for his wife and baby, but she never waited. My grandfather had some doubts about making it in the new country, but it was too late. She was on the next boat, six-month-old Peter in her arms.

They settled in New York City. Abraham invested Rosa's savings in real estate, and they were reasonably prosperous until the Depression. Their house was a way-station for any number of immigrating relatives. Herbert, the seventh child, was born in July of 1929 when my grandmother was 49.

As the daughter of a professional cook in Hungary, Rosa brought to the new country a rich culinary tradition. In New York she would get her spices at Paprikas Weiss, an institution on Second Avenue and 81st Street that has only recently closed. "All the Hungarians went there," my mother recalls.

"All the Hungarians," of course, meant Jews and gentiles alike. Actually, almost no foods are uniquely Jewish, save *matzoh* (the unleavened bread) and *haroset* (the sweet mortar of apples and raisins served on Passover). My grandmother simply adapted the recipes of her native Hungary to Jewish dietary rules. We never had sour cream with our goulash or in chicken paprikash, for instance, because of the kosher laws that proscribe serving milk with meat. Rosa never cooked pork, for the same reason. The Weiss family itself was not Jewish, and a cookbook published by Peter Weiss, *The Paprikas Weiss Cookbook*, would be unusable for Jews who adhere to kosher rules.

Herbert tells me that the gas oven at their house was always lit from Friday night until Saturday night. This was because orthodox Jews observed strictly the call to rest on the Sabbath (Saturday), including refraining from lighting a flame or turning the gas on or off. Rosa and Mulvinea cooked all day on Friday, as the ban on work meant that they could not cook again until dusk on Saturday. Everything was prepared by sundown and would be reheated in the warm oven.

Milton remembers that he had to give up running track

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NOTES ON THE FOODS OF ROMANIA

by Randy K. Schwartz

Last June I visited the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, held on the Mall in Washington, D.C. For two weeks every summer the festival spotlights the music, folklore, foodways and other aspects of the traditional culture of one state and one foreign country. For 1999 the focuses were New Hampshire and Romania; as usual, the cooking demonstrations drew many interested onlookers.

In the "Romanian Home Kitchen" on the day of my visit, Rodica Bulboaca— youngest daughter in a family of 12 children from Moldavia (eastern Romania) and herself the mother of three sons— was doing the cooking, while Nicolae Constantinescu served as narrator and interpreter. By parking oneself under their tent for a few hours, one could gain an overview of the influences that have shaped foodways in the region. The day's cooking agenda included *plachinta*, a sweet pancake; *mămăligă*, a cornmeal mush; *ciorbă*, a sour soup; *sarmale în foi de varză*, stuffed leaves of cabbage; ritual breads; and *Salade à la Macédoine*.

Roman Legions

Plachinta is a popular sweet pancake of Romania. It is traditionally made with wheat flour, and fried as thin as a crêpe. They are stacked up and alternated with layers of feta cheese and honey, making a kind of cake or pastry that dates back to the earliest days of farming.

After returning to Michigan, I learned that *plachinta* evolved from the ancient Roman *placenta*, a kind of flat round wheat cake (and the source of our word for the afterbirth of the same name). The Roman *placenta* was used in religious ceremonies. An elaborate recipe, calling for honey and fresh sheep's cheese, was recorded in Cato the Elder's treatise *On Agriculture*, c. 200 BCE.¹ Roman soldiers carried the tradition to the occupied province of Dacia (106-271 CE), roughly what is now Romania. A millennium later, with Hungarian control of Transylvania, the dish migrated north and west. Teamed with a countless array of stuffings, the pancakes became a high art among Hungarians (*palacsinta*), Austrians (*Palatschinken*) and Czechs (*palačinky*).²

The staple food of the Roman legionnaires, a grain mash called *pulmentum*, later became the basis for *polenta* in Italy and *mămăligă* in Romania.

Ottoman Rule

I watched as Rodica prepared a thick sour soup of chicken and homemade noodles. To make the noodles, she mixed a dough of white flour and eggs, and rolled this thin using a pin on a floured surface. With a knife she cut long strips about 1/8 inch wide, then piled these atop one another to be cut crosswise into noodles. She shook the noodles over a sieve to remove excess flour, rested them for half an hour to dry, then boiled them in water along with minced onions,

herbs and tomatoes.

The traditional souring agent of such soups is *borș*, which is wheat bran that has been fermented in a clay pot. (The word is Slavic and pronounced "borsch," but should not be confused with *borshch*, the Russian beet soup.) Instead of *borș*, Rodica used a bottled liquid, as has become common in recent years; the liquid can be vinegar, lemon juice or sauerkraut juice. The soured leaves of grape or of green sorrel are also sometimes used. If soured with *borș*, the soup is called *borș*; otherwise it is called *ciorbă*, which derives from the Turkish *çorba*, "soup."³ Northeast of Turkey, in the Caucasus, the word is *chorpa*.

The Turkish borrowing reflects the Ottoman period in Romanian history. The Turks greatly influenced Eastern European cuisine, and the eastern regions of Romania (Wallachia and Moldavia) remained Ottoman principalities from the 15th through 19th Centuries. A reflection of this is "Turkish wheat," the term used for maize in this region, since this New World grain spread rapidly from Spain by way of Islamic northern Africa to the lands ruled by the Ottomans. In the years after Columbus' voyages, "Turkish wheat" became the grain of choice for *mămăligă*, a thick Romanian mush often served with feta cheese and sour cream; the same thing happened to *polenta* in Italy. In Transylvania it became common to add cornmeal, in equal measure with wheat flour, to the batter used in making *plachinta* pancakes. Romanian desserts such as *baclava* and *cataif* show an even clearer Turkish influence.

Foods in Romania today remain stamped by particular cultures. Nicolae explained to us that *ciorbă* is especially popular in Transylvania, Moldavia and Wallachia where Muslim influence was deepest. It is usually eaten as a first dish, particularly at weddings, funerals, and the four-times-yearly Celebrations of the Dead. By contrast, cabbage and bacon are symbolic of Christianity; stuffed cabbage in particular is a traditional Christmas dinner in Romania.

French Émigrés

Rodica's *Salade à la Macédoine* was a salad of minced beef, eggplant, potatoes, carrots, and pickles dressed with a homemade mayonnaise. Nicolae pointed out that it is often prepared for Christmas and New Year's celebrations.

The salad is of rather recent origin compared to the other items on the menu. In the 1800s, the nobility of Romania and other parts of Eastern Europe became enamoured of French high culture. They sent their children to Paris for schooling, while French chefs migrated east to open *restaurants*, *cafés* and *pâtisseries* in Bucharest, or "Little Paris" as it came to be known. The earlier French tradition of the *Macédoine*, a mixture of vegetables served either warm or chilled and dressed with butter, oil or mayonnaise, was simply transplanted to Slavic countries. In Russia, a warm *Macédoine* of vegetables is often served in a béchamel-and-sherry sauce with cold sliced beef tongue.⁴

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BOOK REVIEW



"THEIR SOULS ABHOR ALL MANNER OF MEAT"

Colin Spencer,
The Heretic's Feast: A History of Vegetarianism
Hanover, NH: Univ. Press of New England, 1995
416 pp., \$19.95 paper

by Don G. Fowler

Don is a retired consultant in public and environmental health. Both he and his wife Ann are longtime CHAA members and vegetarians.

Twenty-four million years ago, we primates were all vegetarians. Not until about 1½ million years ago did the transition from herbivore to omnivore begin among our early hominid ancestors. There is evidence that fish was the first non-plant food to enter our ancestral diet; eating four-legged animals and red meat appeared rather later in our history.

The Heretic's Feast aims at presenting the historical record of mankind refraining, for whatever reasons, from eating animals. Its author— an accomplished British writer on vegetarian food and cookery, and president of the Guild of Food Writers— succeeds admirably. You will not find any special pleading in his book, nor any recipes or discussion of cooking per se, but instead a balanced account of food in history and how our diet relates to that history. This is the first book of its kind to appear in well over a hundred years.

Diet and Intelligence

It is a fact noted with interest by some commentators that the human brain has increased in size and capacity quite markedly over the past million years or so, concurrently with a considerable increase in meat consumption. The question arises: Does eating meat stimulate, directly or indirectly, intellectual activity and brain growth?

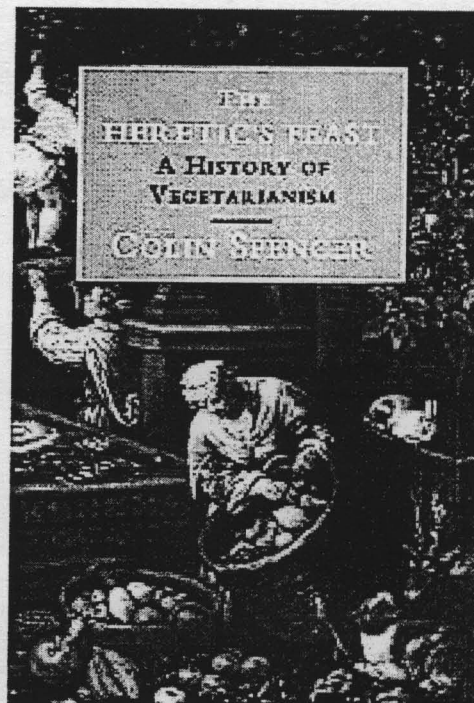
The relation between diet and intellect is far more complex, acting at the level of whole populations over eons of time. Many organisms cannot change their

diets, whereas mankind was a most successful adapter. The Ice Ages, for example, resulted in drastic changes in his environment, notably the decrease or absence of plant food sources. Greater brain size and capacity allowed hominids to migrate to new areas and/or to shift to omnivorous diets. Increases in human meat-eating and intelligence coincided because hunting and fishing were cultural adaptations made possible by brain development, not because eating flesh itself made people smarter.

That eating a carrot, for instance, does not require or result in either more or less intellectual activity than, say, eating a rabbit can also be seen at the level of individuals. The list of vegetarians includes names such as Leonardo da Vinci and Albert Einstein. And Spencer notes, sadly and in passing, that of 60 biographies of Leonardo, only two mention his lifelong avoidance of meat.

In the era of recorded human history, there has never been a time when our species was anything but omnivorous. Historically vegetarianism, or more correctly non-meat eating (the term "vegetarian" did not even appear in our language until the mid-1840s) arose as an intellectual belief or a religious conviction. Pythagoras (about 500 BCE) taught that all animals have souls and are related to us all; since we have inhabited animal bodies in past lives, to eat an animal would be like eating a relative. The Hindu belief in vegetarianism is a religious conviction that rests, among other reasons, on belief in cycles of reincarnation.

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Vegetarians as Outcasts

Since vegetarianism is essentially a dietary practice, often justified on religious or moral grounds, the question arises how its practitioners came to be treated as heretics, heaped with the opprobrium of whole societies?

Ritual sacrifice of living beings to gods had appeared early in human history. Gradually, it became obnoxious or inconvenient to sacrifice fellow humans (Aztec society being a notably late exception to this), and beasts became accepted substitutes. Feasting upon the slain animal became an homage to the gods, satisfying to both stomach and spirit. And what could a vegetarian offer the gods: a cabbage? Please do not insult our deity! Vegetarians became outcasts, heretics or worse.

The issue of heresy became endemic in Europe in the 13th and 14th Centuries. The Inquisition launched by the Medieval Church was a judicial procedure devised to root out religious heretics and to combat nonconformism in society. From the start, the Inquisition faced enormous problems of scale (since there was so much "heresy") and identification (since heretics looked just like everybody else). But some of the known heretical sects had given up eating meat, and this seemed to provide an easy and simple solution for the examining inquisitor: he who refuses an offered piece of meat must be a heretic.

The Case Against Meat

The case made by advocates of a vegetarian diet has remained remarkably consistent over time. They point to the positive health benefits for those who eschew meat. They point to the ecological benefit to the world if one acre of land were sufficient to feed a person (rather than the 12 acres presently required by each American).

Advocates for vegetarianism used to allege that killing animals leads to war and other violent activity, and that giving up meat would make the world a peaceful place. That was before the name of Adolf Hitler had to be added to the list of notable vegetarians.[†] Nevertheless, the author reminds us of the natural association of vegetarianism with the ethical treatment of animals and with a greater regard for their right to live proper lives. Our present-day corporate practice of assembly-line animal production, with its associated mistreatment of living creatures, is given some much needed attention in Spencer's book.

[†] Editor's Note: Rynn Berry, reviewing this book in *Vegetarian Voice* (Summer 1995), refutes the claim that Hitler was a vegetarian.

GRANDMOTHER ROSA'S GOULASH (from page 4)

in high school because it was his job on Friday afternoons to come home and sweep and wash the kitchen floor. He would then cover it with newspapers so it would stay clean until the Sabbath began.

Food Was How People Connected

In my mother's childhood, the kitchen was the center of family life. The kitchen at Elsmere Place was long and narrow. The oven was at the far end of the room, and a table just inside the doorway was where everyone collected. A big sink on the left-hand wall served as a bathtub for us grandkids until we became self-conscious. I remember peals of laughter as my grandfather would tickle our soapy feet in a circular pattern, reciting a little Hungarian rhyme.

Uncle Jack, Mulvinea's oldest son, would stop by with a *babka* from the Babka Bakery, where he worked until the day he died. The white box was printed with a pattern of little girls and tied with white string. The cake was tall and glazed with sugar. My grandmother cut it in thin slices; the yeasty cake was rich with eggs and studded with bits of candied citrus peel and raisins. Milton remembers that the Babka Bakery closed during World War II because the owners refused to bake with oleo.

People always dropped by, and there was always enough food to set another place. Milton recalls the family sitting around the oak dining table, which my grandfather had made himself. His father would dig the marrow out of a bone with a sharp knife, spread it on a piece of challah and give each child a little piece. "Sometimes it was no bigger than a crouton," Herbert adds, "depending on how many people were over."

Herbert says that he never saw his mother out of the kitchen and never saw her sleep. When he woke up in the morning, she was cooking breakfast; when he came home from school she was making dinner; when he went to bed, she was still in the kitchen. As a teenager, when he came home at two in the morning, she would be awake, and instead of getting angry she would ask, "Are you hungry?" He remembers visiting her in the hospital with his father; when she woke up after surgery her first words were, "Did you have lunch?"

As children, we loved to visit in the house on Elsmere Place. There was a lovely garden in the back with little walkways among the flowers. It was a magical place to a child's eye. I also loved having my grandparents visit us. A deck of cards was all my grandfather needed to entertain us, and he could make all the kids laugh with his jokes and tickling. We played a dumbed-down version of Rummy 500, and he was endlessly patient, as if he was exactly where he wanted to be, doing exactly what he wanted to be doing.

My grandmother could always be found in the kitchen. Food was how she connected to her children and her grandchildren. It was her elaborate and consuming expression of her love and her desire to create a welcoming home.

SESQUICENTENNIAL OF IRISH FAMINE

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REFLECTIONS ON THE GREAT HUNGER

In the human record on food and diet, not many single events have loomed large enough to shape the course of world history. The Irish Famine, however, was undoubtedly one such event. What began as a severe local crisis in the production and consumption of food became a human calamity, unleashing forces of unrest and mass migration that were felt on several continents.

The ongoing 150th anniversary of the Famine (1845-52) has renewed public and academic thirst for studies and writings that grapple with the origins and ramifications of the catastrophe. Cecil Blanche Woodham-Smith's seminal 1964 study *The Great Hunger: Ireland, 1845-1849* was reissued as a Penguin Paperback in 1995. With its detailed examination of the actions of landlords, government officials and army officers, her book was perhaps the first to shine a glaring light on the role of the British establishment in a disaster that had routinely been blamed on the "fecklessness" of the Irish peasant. Also available as a paperback reprint is Redcliffe Salaman's highly respected *The History and Social Influence of the Potato* (1949), about one-quarter of which is devoted to the Famine and to the history of the potato in Ireland.

The strength of such older classics is their dogged mustering of detail, but some readers have pointed out that a certain dryness of presentation prevents these works from fully capturing the human side of the tragedy. Many of the more recent studies treat the social impact of the famine by examining such spheres as migration and popular culture. The mainstream of current scholarship today views the causes of the disaster in primarily ecological terms, focusing on the repeated failure of the potato crop, the main food source of the poorer classes in Ireland.

Here in the States, when we visualize starving Irish immigrants, we usually think of the hundreds of thousands who voyaged westward across the ocean to New York harbor in the 1840s. Frank Neal's recent study *Black '47: Britain and the Famine Irish* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998; 292pp.) focuses on the almost equal numbers who hopped freighters eastward across the Irish Sea. Neal, a professor of economic and social history at the University of Salford (Salford, England), has made a detailed examination of poorhouse and burial archives, local news reports and

other public records to document the Irish refugee experience in places like Liverpool, Glasgow, and South Wales, producing a solid and scholarly piece of working-class history. A key aspect in understanding the famine, he shows, is to grasp that the crop failure in Ireland was compounded by a grossly inadequate British response. As he states in his Introduction, "Far from Britain proving a haven, for many Irish, the experience of the British slums was a continuation of the horrors being endured in Ireland. In the Registrar General's report for 1847, Liverpool was described as 'the cemetery of Ireland.'"

Among other recent works is that by Cormac Ó Gráda, *Black '47 and Beyond: The Great Irish Famine in History, Economy and Memory* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1999; 302pp., \$35 cloth). Not a chronological narrative but a comparative and interdisciplinary study, it includes analysis of the demography of the famine and the role of landlords, traders, markets, moneylenders, medicine and migration, as well as a concluding chapter taking up the broader social impact of the famine, such as on folk memory. This work supplements Ó Gráda's earlier *The Great Irish Famine* (Macmillan, 1989), now considered by many the definitive introduction to the calamity.

John Killen, ed., *The Famine Decade: Contemporary Accounts 1841-1851* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1995; 274pp., \$22 paper) contains excerpts from news accounts, government reports and opinion pieces, together with some poems and political cartoons of the time. Noel Kissane's *The Irish Famine: A Documentary History* (Dublin: National Library of Ireland, 1995; 184pp., \$18.95 paper) uses contemporary newspaper reports, workhouse records, maps, statistics and engravings to document the attitudes of Prime Ministers, administrators, landlords, relief workers, and the victims themselves. Tom Hayden, ed., *Irish Hunger: Personal Reflections on the Legacy of the Famine* (Boulder, CO: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1997; 295pp., \$15.95 paper) is an anthology of writing by over two dozen modern authors reflecting upon the broad impact of the events. Helen Litton, *The Irish Famine: An Illustrated History* (Minneapolis: Irish Books & Media, 1994; 144pp., \$11.95 paper) is a succinct and graphic narrative of the famine. Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine 1845-52* (Boulder, CO: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1995; 450pp., \$16.95 paper) provides a chronological account based on detailed documentary examination. Briefer and less well documented is Kinealy's more recent *A Death-Dealing Famine: The Great Hunger in Ireland* (London: Pluto Press, 1997; 192pp., \$18.95 paper).

FALL MEETINGS EXPLORE AMERICAN AND ITALIAN FOOD HISTORY

"The Most Beautiful City in the World"

Our incoming president Margot Michael spent three months in Florence in 1999, including a week of instruction in Tuscan cooking at the Cordon Bleu school there. Margot kicked off our 1999-2000 program by sharing her research and observations about Florentine cuisine at our Sept. 19 meeting.

The food of the Romans who founded Florence in 59 BCE was simple and frugal, based on barley, fish, vegetables and cheeses. As local wealth increased, the rich took to the ostentation of banquets featuring the likes of peacock brains and flamingo tongue. The diet of the poor included things like nettle soup, acorns, lizards and mice. Some cooking implements and foods (grilled meats, the wide pasta *pappardelle*, the flatbread *schiciata*) date from the Etruscan period prior to the city's founding.

Margot detailed an interesting political connection during the 1200s, when powerful rival Florentine families dwelled in fortified tower-houses. Food prepared in the small kitchens, perched high for fear of fire, remained necessarily simple: *fettunta*, or toast rubbed with olive oil and garlic; *panzanella*, a bread salad; *ribollita*, a "reboiled" soup of beans, cabbage, and old bread; chestnut cake. As this period gave way to Medici rule, kitchens became more spacious, food more plentiful, and the Medicis world-famous for their sumptuous feasts. Many classic dishes such as *crêpes* and *duck à l'orange* entered France from Italy via aristocratic connections.

The introduction of New World foods—corn, tomatoes, potatoes, haricots—made a profound impact. Even today Florentines are nicknamed *mangiafagioli*, "bean eaters." Florentine food, still recognizably distinct from that of other regions of Italy, emphasizes simple, fresh ingredients and an aversion to waste.

A Colonial New England Kitchen

At our Oct. 17 meeting Vivian Gniewek, on-site coordinator of the Docent Program at Greenfield Village in Dearborn, MI, spoke to us about "Eighteenth Century Foodways in Colonial America." Vivian is also herself a docent, spending much of her time at Daggett Farmhouse, the relocated home of an 18th-Century Connecticut carpenter and his family.

Fire and hearth were the focus of activity in the Daggett kitchen. Vivian described the equipment used to heat water, roast meat, and bake bread. The docents have occasion to use a spit with andirons, a dutch oven resting on hot coals, and a 40-inch-deep beehive oven. Most cookware of the time was cast iron and imported; flatware was of pewter or wood.

Women's domestic duties included growing vegetables and herbs in the kitchen garden, and bartering meat and

other animal products. Recipes passed from mother to daughter: cookbooks of the time, generally English, were directed to the upper class. The simple diet was basically English, with considerable Indian influence. Rye was the basic grain, wheat a relative luxury. Midday dinner was generally the only hot meal for farm families. Meals had no separate courses.

Frugality and resourcefulness were crucial for colonial New England farmers. Cheese, bread, pickles, preserves, salted fish, and dried vegetables, berries and herbs helped conserve perishables; pies and hasty puddings used up odds and ends. The Daggetts produced their own hops and beer; they also used hops and potatoes to produce yeast (not then available commercially), and used beer broth in cooking when milk was short. They also made maple sugar, sparing the expense of cane sugar, sorghum and molasses.

A Pioneer of Food Purity

Dr. Lisa Robinson, a librarian at Michigan State University, delivered a Nov. 14 talk on "Mary Engle Pennington: Early Pioneer in Food Science and Refrigeration." Lisa's interest in this topic grew out of her doctoral work on the history of women in chemistry.

A hundred years ago, when Americans were becoming more aware of public health hazards in the food system, Pennington (1872-1952) emerged as an authority on the refrigeration of perishable foods. She performed bacteriological lab studies for the Philadelphia Dept. of Public Health and later the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, pioneering the concept of establishing a "chain of cleanliness" stretching from the producers to the consumers of food.

Pennington's study of pathogens in the Philadelphia milk supply allowed that city to lead the way in instituting inspection and certification for milk purity (a factor in the success of Philadelphia[®] brand cream cheese). She devised standards for the grading of eggs, and patented new designs for poultry-processing equipment and ice-refrigerated boxcars. Her work helped lay the legal basis for enforcement of the 1906 U.S. Pure Food and Drug Act. Interestingly, Pennington opposed the drive for milk pasteurization, arguing that boiling milk destroys important nutrients and is unnecessary if contamination is controlled at the source.

References on Romania (p. 5)

1. Stephen Hill and Anthony Bryer, "Byzantine Porridge: *Tracta*, *Trachanas* and *Tarhana*," in John Wilkins, David Harvey and Mike Dobson, eds., *Food in Antiquity* (Exeter, UK: Univ. of Exeter Press, 1995), pp. 44-53.
2. George Lang, *The Cuisine of Hungary* (New York: Wings Books, 1994), p. 371.
3. Nicolae Klepper, *Taste of Romania* (New York: Hippocrene, 1999), p. 83.
4. Alexandra Kropotkin, *The Best of Russian Cooking* (New York: Hippocrene, 1993), pp. 195-6.

CHAA CLOSES OUT CENTURY WITH A NEW PRESIDENT

We begin the new year, century, and millenium with Margot Michael at the helm as our new President. A member of CHAA since 1997, Margot has had her own catering business in the past and is currently owner of the Old West Side Bed and Breakfast. She has taken courses at La Varenne cooking school in Paris and at Le Cordon Bleu in Paris and Florence. We know that Margot's enthusiasm for and knowledge of things culinary will be of great service to our organization as she steps into her new role.

In recognition of the outstanding decade of contributions by President Julie Lewis, founding member Jan Longone presented a statement and a pair of gifts on behalf of the members at our December participatory dinner celebrating the century. Below, we have printed Jan's statement as well as a response from Julie. A more complete report on the December dinner will be provided in the next issue of Repast.

To Julie—a Rare Person

With Much Gratitude and Respect for a Job Well Done

For more than ten years, you have been the gracious, competent, responsible, creative leader of the CHAA. The only thing that saves us from being sad at your leaving this position is that we expect to see you fully participating in every way.

We wanted to offer some small token of our love and appreciation—and, of course, thought an old cookbook or two might be just the right thing.

These two books were chosen because, in many ways, they represent you and all you have contributed.

The Old Master Cookery Book (London, 1927) represents your English heritage. This is a first time printing of an early manuscript cookbook. The introducer, A. Bonnet Laird, explains that this book paints a most vivid picture and lifelike portrait of the author, through the collection of recipes and rules by which she ordered her happy and prosperous home. He goes on to say that her zeal, lively curiosity and breadth of interest all shine through in her recipes. He discusses her generosity, her "lavishness with cream," and other positive traits. She borrows recipes from others—and credits them. It seems to us that all these positive traits define Julie, as well as the anonymous author of this old book.

The second book is a tribute to an early Englishwoman, E. Smith, who, although she herself did not come to America, contributed to teaching America how to cook. Her cookbook *The Compleat Housewife* was the first cookbook printed in America (Williamsburg, Virginia, 1742). It was first published

in London in 1727 and was very popular on both sides of the Atlantic, in the mother country and in the colonies. It was probably the most influential book of its day until it was superceded by Hannah Glasse's *Art of Cookery*.

This *Williamsburg Art of Cookery* reprints many of Smith's recipes but adds many more traditional American recipes from both manuscript and published sources. It was one of the earliest attempts at American culinary history. Somehow it seemed most appropriate for us to thank England for sending both E. Smith and Julie Lewis to us, to help us understand or own gastronomic past.

Together, these two books are a special message of thanks to Julie for all her hard work and good leadership.

Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

Response From Julie

Dear Culinary Historians,

Our gathering on December 5, 1999, with so many of you present, was a very special one for me as it capped off ten fulfilling years as your president. We feasted on a plethora of American dishes from the Twentieth Century, reminisced around a blazing fire, and picked our collective culinary brains as we wrestled with the quiz. All of this was as I imagined it would be; what I was not anticipating was the wonderfully touching tribute delivered on your behalf by Jan and the presentation of two such splendid books, *The Old Master Cookery Book* and *Williamsburg Art of Cookery*. I am flattered to think that you believe the authors represent me and my contributions to this group in some way. I shall always treasure them. My culinary interests took root in England, in my mother's kitchen, followed by professional training, but it has been in the United States where they have been broadened and enriched since I joined this group some fifteen years ago.

I look forward to many more years of continuing involvement, albeit in a different capacity, and know that you will extend the same support to Margot as you have to me.

With heartfelt thanks,
Affectionately,
Julie

MORSELS & TIDBITS

We are delighted to report that our founding member **Jan Longone** has received the honor of appointment as Curator of American Culinary History for the William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. The Clements Library, with which Jan has worked closely for a number of years, houses one of the leading collections in the U.S. for the study of the history of the Americas beginning in the 15th Century. The collection is national in scope, rather than regional, with particular strength in the period of the American Revolution through the mid-19th Century. Jan encourages interested CHAA members and others to volunteer to serve on a corps of docents that the library is aiming to pull together to assist with a variety of important ongoing tasks. The contact person is Shneen M. Coldiron at 734/764-2347.

Jan has also been appointed to the editorial board of the Univ. of California's new quarterly, *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* and the associated book series, "Studies in Food and Culture," which were mentioned in this column in our Summer 1999 issue. The journal, which begins publication in January 2001, aims to make readers aware of food as an important source of knowledge about different cultures and societies. Combining the latest research with an appreciation for the pleasures and aesthetics of food, *Gastronomica* will provide a forum for sharing ideas, provoking discussion, and encouraging thoughtful reflection on the history, literature, representation and cultural impact of food. The editors welcome submissions in the form of essays (not to exceed 8000 words), poetry, original artwork, photographs and cartoons. Contact general editor **Darra Goldstein** at Weston Hall, 995 Main Street, Williams College, Williamstown, MA 01267.

CHAA member **Pat Cornett**, an accomplished writer and our founding newsletter editor, has just published a cookbook, *Macaroni and Cheese: Mom's Home Cooking* as a wedding gift to her oldest son, Tom. The 22 recipes, accompanied by family recollections as well as photos and line drawings, are grouped into sections focused on breakfast, main dishes, side dishes, and desserts. An extensive review by Sylvia Rector in the *Detroit Free Press* (Dec. 15, 1999, pp. F1-2) capped "Books of Love," a five-part series on Michigan family cookbooks. Rector asked readers for news of other family cookbooks in the state and reportedly received nearly 300 replies! Pat offers to sell copies of her book, spiral-bound at 96 pages, for

\$15 plus shipping. Contact her at 248/258-9214, at pc@annis.com, or at 31651 Auburn Drive, Beverly Hills, MI 48025.

Peter H. Blum labored at the Stroh Brewery Co. in Detroit from 1970 until 1989, when the breweries themselves were sold to Coors, and since his retirement he has put his training in history to good use as company archivist. Now he has published a labor of love, *Brewed in Detroit: Breweries and Beers Since 1830* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1999; 353 pp., \$34.95 cloth). This handsome and substantial book is a history of the brewing industry in southeast Michigan from its beginnings in the 1830s. The material is organized into sections on each brewing company, and the sections grouped thematically into chapters. The coverage includes seven phases of the industry: early Anglo-Saxon ale brewers, German immigrant brewers after 1848, the brewing dynasties of the 1880s, Prohibition, post-Prohibition, World War 2 years, and postwar competition.

Andrew F. Smith, food writer and historian at New School University in Manhattan, continues to flesh out the history of the tomato by publishing another juicy tale, *Souper Tomatoes: The Story of America's Favorite Food* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2000; 236 pp., \$25 cloth). This is a history of the tomato processing industry, with particular emphasis on canning and soup production in the U.S. The book traces, for example, how the introduction of canning, particularly with the birth of Campbell's Soup Co. in New Jersey around the time of the Civil War, transformed tomato soup from a homemade to a commercial product. Also included are such historical recipes as Judith Montefiore's "Dry Tomato Soup," Charles Ranhofer's "Bouillabaisse," Mrs. Rorer's "Chicken Gumbo with Oysters" and *Table Talk's* "Tomato Soup à l'Andalouse." "Until the 1980s," Smith has commented, "tomato soup was the number one selling soup in America. Then someone wrote some books with the words 'chicken soup' in the title and chicken soup sales went off the chart. I hope *Souper Tomatoes* will redress this error and put tomato soup back in the number one spot where it rightfully belongs." Smith, whose book acknowledges the assistance of CHAA members **Robert Lewis** and **Jan Longone**, has addressed our group on the centennial of catsup (Sept. 1995) and the history of snack food (May 1997).

CHAA CALENDAR

February 20 - Tour of Katherine's Catering
Speaker: Katherine Farrell, Owner

March 19 - American Spoon Foods®
Speaker: Justin Rashid, Owner

April 16 - *Seasoning Savvy*
Speaker: Alice Arndt, author

May 21 - Title to be announced
Speaker: Ari Weinzwieg, co-owner,
Zingerman's Delicatessen

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