



Repast

Quarterly Newsletter of the Culinary History Society of Ann Arbor

REFERENCE

KOMAGATA DOJO ENTERS ITS THIRTIETH CENTURY

by Phred Kaufman

Phred Kaufman has lived in Japan for the past quarter-century, mostly in Sapporo where he has run a successful beer bar for over twenty years. He also imports Rogue ale from Oregon. He has a wife and two children and is happy to drink beer for a living.

Having lived in Japan for 25 years and loving to eat, I thought I knew Japanese food and my former home of Tokyo quite well. But when asked by *Repast* to do a story on the Komagata Dojo, I was in for a pleasant surprise.

The restaurant, founded in 1801, is located near the Toranomon or "Thunder Gate" shrine in the old Asakusa part of Tokyo. "Komagata" refers to a particular section of this district, while *dojo* means "loach," the signature dish of this restaurant. It's a freshwater fish, elongated (like a miniature eel) and

Asian Foods Issue

barbed. Loach are not to be confused with "leech," although I'd bet those, too, are eaten somewhere in Asia!

The first thing to strike me when I visited was the simplicity of the restaurant. I entered the old Japanese-style building and removed my shoes, as is the custom before stepping onto the *tatami* mats made from rushes. Where one usually finds low tables, I was surprised to see four long, low-lying planks laid out from one end of the room to the other. On both sides of these planks, seven *zabuton* (thin cushions) were placed on the floor for customers to sit on.

continued on next page

The author and
a waitress
outside
Komagata Dojo.





A dish of *dojo otama* (left) and the accompanying box of extras (right).

KOMAGATA DOJO *continued from previous page*

The menu features mainly loach and whale. I asked the kimono-clad waitress for a representative meal and was served loaches *otama* style. This consisted of a stone box with hot coals inside, and a deep, round stone dish on top. The *dojo* were laid out like the proverbial sardines in a can, and the sauce, which was poured over the fish after the latter had been covered with green onions, was a combination of *mirin* (a brewed cooking sweetener akin to *saké*) and *shoyu* (soy sauce). Accompanying the dish was an oblong wooden box with a large compartment holding additional green onions, and two smaller compartments for ground hot pepper and *sansho* (a tangy, aromatic

powder ground from the dried berries of the prickly ash). I was told that when the onion had completely melted into the broth, the dish would be ready to eat.

This gave me time to soak up the atmosphere and to ask some questions of the manager who, although not 200 years old, has been there quite a while. The written history of Komagata Dojo starts not with the opening (or sliding) of its front doors, but with the birth in 1776 of its founder, Shichisuke (at this time in Japanese history, commoners had no last names). That year, which marked the founding of the United States, also marked the beginning of the Kyowa period under the Tokugawa Shogunate of Japan. At the time, Tokyo was known as Edo, capital of the shogunate.

The sweet smell of the broth drew my attention to the fact that the green onions had melted into the broth as I had conversed with the manager. The waitress had replenished my sauce twice. I took a couple of the *dojo* in my chopsticks and savored them. I asked why *dojo* seemed so much more bitter than eel? I was told that

continued on page 5

Repast

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Book Review

FRESH FROM THE KITCHENS OF MALABAR

Maya Kaimal,
Savoring the Spice Coast of India:
Fresh Flavors from Kerala
 New York: HarperCollins, 2000
 223pp. + bibliography and index. \$27.50.
 Lavishly illustrated with color photographs.

by Carlo Coppola

Carlo Coppola teaches courses on South Asian and Middle Eastern culture and literature, and on linguistics at Oakland University, Rochester, MI. He has served for decades as editor of the Journal of South Asian Literature. A graduate of the Culinary Arts Program at Schoolcraft College, Livonia, MI, Prof. Coppola also teaches courses on Food History, on Wine, and on Culinary French and Italian in that program at that institution. He regularly takes students on field trips to two area restaurants featuring South Indian food (mostly in the style of Andhra Pradesh, India's Telugu-speaking area): Udipi (29210 Orchard Lake Road, Farmington Hills) and Priya (72 West Maple Road, Troy).

When I first became acquainted with South Asian—that is, Indian—food in the early 1960s, relatively few Indians were living or studying in the U.S. Of course, virtually no Indian cookbooks were to be found on bookstore shelves (which were loaded down with Julia Child's first tome, as I recall). An occasional one might be found in used bookstores. My first Indian cookbook was a second- or third-hand copy of *Cooking the India Way* (1962) by Attia Hosain and Sita Pasricha, the former perhaps better known abroad as a novelist and short-story writer in English. One in a series of twelve books on international cooking published by Spring Books, London, this small, rather sullen-looking volume with gray cover and no photographs or even drawings was printed in Czechoslovakia on cheap, off-white paper. The recipes in it are, for the most part, timid, catering to the 1950s British palate (or lack thereof), often requiring the user, I soon found out, to double the amount of spices and herbs in order to get an honest Indian "kick" out of them. I return to this spice-stained volume from time to time for some "tried-and-true" recipes I have upgraded and revamped over the years for the tastes of my family, friends, and myself.

How things have changed.

Thanks to many felicitous happenings, not the least of which was the U.S. government's lifting of restrictions on Asian immigration in the middle 1960s, many South Asians have come to study in the United States. Quite a few of them settled here permanently—mostly doctors, academics, scientists, and engineers—and their numbers swelled to several million, not including their American-born offspring. One such immigrant was Chandran Kaimal, from North Parur, located in the state of Kerala, on the southwest tip of the subcontinent. Kerala, India's fabled Spice Coast (Malabar Coast), the home of legendary Tellecherry pepper

and the intended destination of Christopher Columbus' first voyage, is one of India's most vital, dynamic states ethnically, religiously, politically, historically, and, of course, culinarily. Mr. Kaimal married an American and settled in suburban Boston, working as an atmospheric physicist and rearing a family for whom he prepared many of the dishes of his homeland halfway around the world. One of his three children, his daughter Maya, has become a food writer. She has produced a number of particularly well-written, well-researched, and informative articles for *Food and Wine*, *Saveur*, and the *Los Angeles Times* Syndicate, as well as two exceptional books: *Curried Flavors: Family Recipes from South India* (Abbeville, 1996), winner of the International Association of Culinary Professionals (IACP) Julia Child Award for First Cookbook, and this current volume, a collection of over 100 recipes, many of them in Ms. Kaimal's family for generations, passed on to her by her paternal aunt, Kamala, and other relatives and friends.

Kerala is an area of great diversity where, as in most parts of India, people primarily identify themselves by their religious affiliation. It boasts a majority population of Hindus, but also sizeable communities of Muslims (many of them descendants of Arab traders who settled in the area permanently well before the advent of Islam in the 6th century CE), Christians (mostly Syrian Orthodox said to have been converted to the faith by St. Thomas the Apostle, as well as Roman Catholic), and Jews (who came to the area after the destruction of both the temples—586 BCE and 70 CE—but many of whom have since immigrated to Israel). Each group prepares its unique, individual cuisine, which draws from the vast array of products and bounty found in this lush tropical coastal area reticulated by more than 1,100 miles of internal rivers and canals.

Kaimal's introductory essay is a warm-hearted, evocative meditation on the smells and tastes of Indian food prepared by her father during her childhood, together with that offered by her Indian relatives on her various trips there starting at age nine. Kaimal also gives a brief historical overview of the area and its people, at various places underscoring how foods and their preparation in Kerala differ from those in North India. Most of us are more familiar with the latter, thanks to the writing and broadcasting of such authors as Julie Sahni and Madhur Jaffrey (the latter also an actress, most recently seen starring with Robert DeNiro in the 1999 Joel Schumacher film *Flawless*) and the predominance of North Indian restaurants in our locale. The contrasts made here by Kaimal are particularly salient. Generally speaking, South Indian food tends to use significantly less meat and more vegetables, legumes, fruit (especially coconut and plantains), and spices than North Indian fare. Of course, coastal areas such as Kerala use an abundance of seafood (called "sea vegetables" in several Indian languages) in many of their cuisines.

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SPICE COAST OF INDIA *continued from previous page*

To start, Kaimal discusses various kinds of equipment and spices to be used in the preparations which follow, including vendors through which one can order hard-to-find items. Consider curry leaves (*karivepila* in Malayalam, the language of Kerala), which she describes as “a signature flavor in the cooking of Kerala” (p. 26). This flavor bears no relation to the ground mixture of spices that goes under the name of “curry powder” (which even the most amateur of Indian cooks is required to shun floridly) or even “*garam masala*.” Curry leaves are, instead, an herb whose taste “falls somewhere between green bell peppers and citrus peel” (p. 26). In some cases, she offers substitutes for ingredients that are virtually impossible to locate in the West; for example, she suggests using tamarind in place of *kodumpuli*, or “gamboge,” a tart fruit used in both the Hindu and the Syrian Christian cooking of Kerala.

I shall confine my remarks to brief comments on only a few of the book’s chapters.

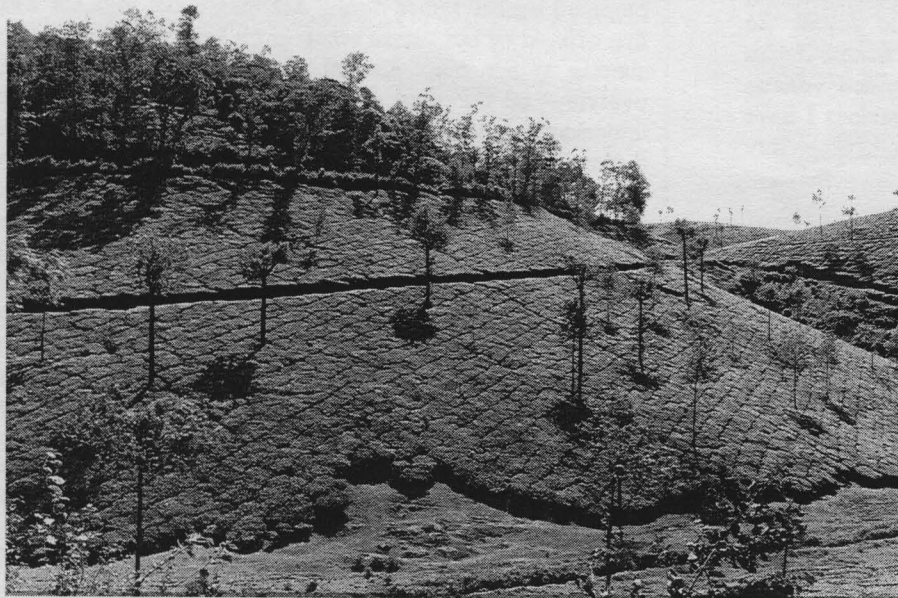
Kaimal’s presentation of appetizers and first courses—which she calls by the Anglo-British term “tiffin” (roughly, lunch, or snacks)—features a variety of crêpes (*dosa*), pancakes (*appam*), dumplings (*idli*) and noodles. These tend to be eaten for breakfast, or as snacks at teatime—5:00 p.m. or so—when people might drop around for a (usually unannounced) visit. Since the batter for most of these items is fermented, their preparation requires special care. The dependably hot, humid climate of Kerala is, of course, lacking in cooler latitudes, but the recipes for fermented batters in this volume have been adapted, states Ms. Kaimal, “with much assistance from my physicist-cook father” (p. 38) so that they will work virtually everywhere. Some of the recipes in this section indicate a soaking and fermenting time of 16 to 19 hours. The *idli* (dumpling) recipe, for example, requires the batter to be kept at 90° F, which might prove

daunting for some cooks. However, Kaimal assures us that the temperature “can be achieved with the help of a trouble light or floodlight fitted with a 25 watt lightbulb. Plug the power cord into an outlet close enough to the oven so that the bulb can rest on a rack in the oven. Turn on the light and prop the door open about an inch with the handle of a wooden spoon” (pp. 46–47). She’s right. It *does* work.

In Kerala, and throughout India in fact, vegetables are prepared in two distinct ways: wet and dry. Meals in Kerala, Kaimal assures us, are composed to balance textures as well as flavors; hence, one should “avoid too much of the same consistency on the plate” (p. 65), a dictum with which chefs anywhere in the world would doubtless agree. An ideal meal might be constituted as follows: (1) for a vegetarian meal (eaten mostly by Hindus): both wet and dry vegetables, some with the ubiquitous coconut, some without, served with rice, *dhal* (lentils), and *pappadam* (legume wafers); (2) for a non-vegetarian meal: one dry and one wet vegetable, *dhal*, and a dish of either fish, poultry, or meat (beef for Christians and Muslims; pork for Christians only). The vegetable section of the book is the most extensive and, for me, the most gratifying, and I particularly recommend Green Beans with Urad Dhal (p. 73), Okra Stuffed with Masala (p. 74), and Carrots with Coconut (p. 77), each of which boasts a uniqueness of taste and an ease of preparation.

Keralan chicken, egg and meat dishes, prepared mostly by Christians, Muslims, and Jews, are markedly different from their North Indian counterparts. Here the sauces are fearless and robust, flecked with coconut and cashews to invoke the tropics. As elsewhere in India, religion plays an important part in *who* prepares *what* and *how*. Kerala, for example, is one of the few Indian states where it is legal to slaughter cows. While Christians and Muslims eat beef, it is generally avoided by Jews out of respect for Hindus. Kosher

A tea plantation in Perayar, Kerala



This photo was kindly lent to us by Malabar Hornblower from a trip that she made this past January to the Malabar Coast, for which she was named at birth. In her article “Where India Flows at a Relaxed Pace” (*New York Times* April 1, 2001, section 5, pp. 11ff.), Malabar described the trip, during which she and her husband Bill Brewster explored the coast on a *kettuvallam* houseboat. Malabar, who lives on Cape Cod, is the author of several cookbooks, notably *The Plimoth Plantation New England Cookery Book*.

(or, for Muslims, *halal*) methods of slaughtering chickens are used, and chicken is the preferred entrée for a Sabbath meal. Most of the recipes in this section feature chicken, and Kaimal is sensitively ecumenical in her presentation of these. The Chicken with Green Chilies and Tamarind (p. 148) is a Jewish recipe, Coriander Chicken (p. 146) is Christian, and Chicken *Kurma* (p. 147) is Muslim. Each is relatively uncomplicated to prepare and palate-pleasingly tasty.

In the "Sweets and Beverages" section, Kaimal points out that Indians tend to eat sweets at teatime rather than at the end of a meal. Because traditional Indian kitchens are not equipped with ovens, sweets are usually made on the stove. Again, these foods are defined by religion: Hindus tend to serve a milk pudding called *payasam*; Christians generally prefer cakes and cookies, while Muslims often relish sweets laced with nuts and raisins. One of Kaimal's most inventive substitutions is found in the recipe for Egg Layer Cake (p. 211), a Muslim dessert which alternates layers of flatbread with egg filling spiked with chopped cashews, raisins, and cardamom. Rather than making flatbread from scratch, she substitutes flour tortillas! As everyone knows who cooked Indian before the advent of South Asian markets in the U.S., one did most of one's shopping for Indian ingredients at Mexican stores.

One has to stretch a bit to find anything problematic with this volume. My 'complaint' (a quibble, really) has to do with Kaimal's placement of recipes for *biriyani*s (meat-and-rice dishes drawn from Central Asian Turkish and Persian cuisines) in the "Rice and Breads" section of the book. While she does parenthetically note on the index pages of both the "Fish and Seafood" and the "Chicken, Eggs and Meat" chapters that *biriyani*s using these respective ingredients are found in the "Rice and Breads" chapter, one might overlook this notation and wonder whether they have *biriyani*s in Kerala. They do, indeed, but in this volume the recipes for them are tucked in a place where I would not have initially thought to look for them. Not a big deal, it's an editorial call, and Kaimal, or her editors, have opted one way, whereas many other South Asian cookbooks go the other way.

The volume also features a thorough and helpful index. The copious photographs that illustrate this excellent volume are also notable. This should not be surprising, since Kaimal is the Photography Editor for *Saveur* magazine. These pictures not only augment our understanding of the food and their preparation, but of Kerala as well. Many of the recipes are enhanced by these lavish, well-chosen photos of the finished product. In other cases, numerous photos show Ms. Kaimal and her aunt at various stages of preparing a particular dish. These add a highly personalized touch to the book. I feel like I'm a special guest in their kitchen, a sacred space in all Indian households where strangers are not readily welcome. Other photos of the Keralan towns, countryside, people, and waterways make this book seem as much a coffee-table travel book as it is cookbook. I will use it often but carefully, in order to avoid staining it with spices, as I have done with so many of my other Indian cookbooks. ■

KOMAGATA DOJO

continued from page 2

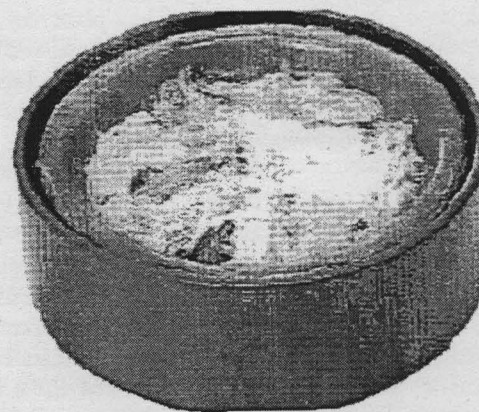
although loach and eel have similar textures, eel is always boned and the liver taken out, while loach is always prepared whole, with the liver accounting for the bitterness.

I asked the manager what kind of place the restaurant was 200 years ago? When the shogunate moved the capital from Kyoto to Edo, it essentially founded a new city with its own culture. Whereas in Kyoto carefully prepared meals were savored with meticulously appointed utensils in fine surroundings, the eating experience in Edo was more of a Samurai "wild west," and the food there was rougher than in the old capital. Speed, quantity and price were major considerations. Thus, the original Komagata Dojo menu was simple indeed: dojo stew, whale meat, rice, and pickled vegetables. All four items are still staples of the restaurant.

When I asked about the impact of the international ban on whaling, the manager shared the common Japanese perception that the ban was no longer necessary. He stated that while whale has never been off the menu, its quality has slipped in recent years.

Although the Komagata Dojo goes back 200 years, it cannot claim an unbroken operating schedule. Having already risen from destruction following an earthquake in 1855, the building was again destroyed in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1913 and rebuilt in 1917. In 1943, loach was declared a restricted item by the wartime authorities, and clams were served instead. In 1945, the building was again leveled, this time by the bombing of Tokyo. The restaurant was resurrected once more in 1947, with *dojo* again featured. In 1951, *yanagawa-nabe* was introduced to the menu. This hot-pot or stew is made with *tofu* (soybean curd) and *gobo* (burdock root). Live *dojo* are put into the broth; as it is heated, the loaches burrow into the cooler *tofu*— which is just where the diner finds them, quite nicely cooked.

The year 2001 finds Komagata Dojo with its original four dining planks intact. Together with additional seating upstairs and in the basement (tables, not planks), there is room for 56 customers. The present owner, Takayuki Watanabe-San, is the sixth generation in the family of proprietors; yet, sitting down for an *otama* in his restaurant, you can have the same experience as diners had there 200 years ago. ■



A bowl of *yanagawa-nabe*

Wasabi and kimch'i

TWO FIRECRACKERS OF THE FAR EAST

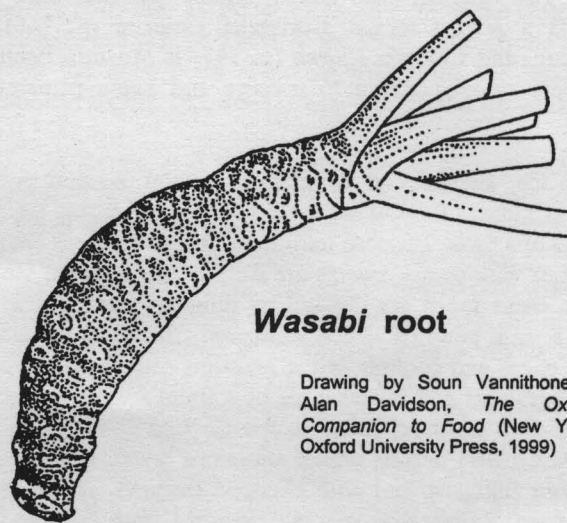
by Randy K. Schwartz

One taste of *wasabi* and you'll know why it was banned from the Zen Buddhist monasteries of old Japan. The heat from this grated herb explodes at the tip of the tongue, does a quick sandblast on the sinuses, then suddenly evaporates leaving a sweet, warm glow in the mouth. Such a sensuous arousal of appetite wreaks havoc on a life of humble contemplation! Accordingly, *wasabi* was kept well clear of the platters and bowls served up to Zen monks.

But outside of *shojin-ryori*, the austere vegetarian cuisine that evolved from the Zen diet, Japanese people feel free to savor *wasabi* with just about any meal. Grocers sell the rhizome, the perennial above-ground root of the plant, in two forms: either fresh, whole, and immersed in pans of water, or else chopped and pickled along with the leaves, flowers and stalks, marinating in brine and the lees of *saké*. Cooks then peel and finely grate the rhizome to produce a moist, fibrous, light green condiment. It is traditional to place a tiny mound of this beside *sushi* (bite-sized portions of lightly vinegared rice arranged with bits of seafood, seaweed, vegetables or egg) or *sashimi* (slices of fresh raw seafood, usually garnished with shredded *daikon* radish and herbs). With chopsticks, the diner dabs such a morsel with a minute quantity of *wasabi* on one side and dips it in *shoju* (soy sauce) on the other side before popping it into the mouth. Those who are a bit less daring might douse some of the fire of *wasabi* by mixing it directly with the *shoju*, creating a milder dipping sauce called *wasabi-joyu*. *Wasabi* is also traditionally added to hot foods such as grilled fish or bowls of *soba* (buckwheat noodles) or of *miso shirumono* (soup of fermented soybean paste).

The earliest known written references to *wasabi* are from 10th-Century Japan, where the plant had been discovered growing along stream beds and river sandbars in just a few mountain valleys and coastal areas. At first, it was referred to as "mountain hollyhock" because of the shape of its leaves. For obvious reasons the grated root acquired the nickname *namida*, "tears." The plant is often called "Japanese horseradish" in the West and, while not closely related to horseradish proper, it does belong to the big *Cruciferae* family that includes not only the radishes but cabbage, kale, cauliflower, broccoli, turnip and mustard.

Matching up *wasabi* with raw seafood occurred early in its culinary history. Humble rice, rich cold fish, and this clean, piercing condiment made for a perfect "tripod" of flavors, just the sort of balance that Japanese cooks strive for. In the food culture of Japan, it is important to achieve a pleasing harmony not only among the tastes but among the textures, temperatures and fragrances of a meal. It was found, for example, that grating the *wasabi* root against shark skin gave the product a desirably soft and smooth finish, and brought its aroma to a peak. Those compounds

**Wasabi root**

Drawing by Soun Vannithone in
Alan Davidson, *The Oxford
Companion to Food* (New York:
Oxford University Press, 1999)

(called isothiocyanates) that give *wasabi* its pungency also destroy many types of microbes: this was another likely factor behind the herb's early association with *sushi* and *sashimi*, for Japanese medical texts in the 10th Century were already noting its effectiveness against what we would now call food poisoning.

Elizabeth Andoh, a University of Michigan alumna, friend of CHAA, and food writer living in Tokyo, tells us that Ieyasu, a feudal warlord of eastern Japan, was said to have a particular fondness for *wasabi*. In 1603 he seized power to found the Tokugawa shogunate, a regime that viewed agriculture as the foundation of politics and society. Andoh suspects that it was Ieyasu who inspired the first commercial cultivation of *wasabi*, which began at that time in the interior of the Izu peninsula, south of the volcanic Mount Fuji. Later, in the early 1800s, use of the herb became much more widespread with the advent of *nigiri-zushi*, the now classic form of *sushi* in which a "finger" of vinegared rice is artistically draped with morsels of raw seafood, and served with vinegared sliced ginger and hot green tea.

The original wild species of the herb, *yuri wasabi*, is such a fussy plant that its rhizomes are quite rare and expensive, about \$105/pound in Japan. This species only really thrives in year-round conditions of hot days and cool nights; there should also be shade from overhanging broadleaf trees, and the ground must be wet from a steady supply of cool (about 50° F.) running water enriched with minerals from volcanic soils. The cultivated species, *sawa wasabi*, whose rhizomes sell at half the price, can be grown in swamp beds or in graveled mountain terraces flooded repeatedly with fresh cool water. It was such terraces on the Izu peninsula that were wrecked by typhoons in 1929, when many *wasabi* growers transferred their operations west to the Azumino plain (in the prefecture of Nagano), famed for its pear groves. There, the herbs are still cultivated on mounds separated by broad streams. Other notable Japanese *wasabi*

farms are located in the Okutama district northwest of Tokyo, and in the prefectures of Shimane and Shinsu.

The "Globalization" of *Wasabi*

In recent decades, Japanese *wasabi* production has encountered new obstacles. Burgeoning development curtailed the land available for farming, while existing beds of *wasabi* often became polluted by the runoff from nearby paddies of rice, a far more important crop. As *wasabi* shortages loomed in Japan, it became profitable for growers elsewhere around the Pacific to introduce its cultivation and to begin exporting the product to the islands. *Wasabi* farms can now be found in Taiwan, New Zealand, Oregon and Washington.

The story of the herb's introduction to North America is an interesting one. Dr. Thomas Lumpkin, a crop scientist at Washington State University in Pullman, had come to appreciate *wasabi* when he was an American GI stationed in Japan during the Vietnam War. In the 1980s, he began studying the plant with the aim of making it a new export crop for farmers in the Pacific Northwest, where growing conditions seemed favorable. He was also keen to let more Americans taste "the real thing." The product typically found on store shelves in the U.S. is a can of "wasabi powder" with instructions for moistening it into a paste, or else a tube of paste already reconstituted from powder. Often, such products are made with horseradish, mustard, sweeteners and dyes; there may be no *wasabi* root at all. This is true even in Japan, where the imitation *wasabi* powder (*kona wasabi*) was introduced commercially in 1939 and became widespread in the years following World War 2.

In the late 1980s, Dr. Lumpkin and his team conducted extensive field research in Japan, and hunted down plant varieties at remote mountain farms and roadside stands. They shipped hundreds of samples back to their campus nursery in Washington and, after solving the myriad agricultural problems involved in growing a plant on a new continent, began scouting for farming sites. Roy Carver, an Oregon real-estate developer, became interested and founded T-Bar Farms in 1991. Its Pacific Farms division, on the central Oregon coast in Florence, grows *wasabi* using an advanced hydroponic system, which continuously recirculates water across tabletop plant beds to simulate a mountain stream. The company sends freshly harvested roots, pure ground *wasabi*, as well as prepared dressings and other products, by air to Japan and to stores and restaurants across the U.S.

The first fully organic *wasabi* farm in North America was established in the late 1990s by Catherine Chadwick, who was raised in Japan and is a former graduate student of Lumpkin's. She grows her plants in Shelton, WA on the Puget Sound, on what used to be a portion of Haldene "Doc" Johnson's Christmas tree farm. There, she and Johnson devised a system that continuously circulates cool artesian spring water across manmade beds of gravel. Chadwick retails her fresh organic *wasabi* root at the Pike Place Market in downtown Seattle, and she wholesales it by mail order.

Traditional as well as creative new uses of *wasabi*—in vinaigrettes or in mashed potatoes, for instance—can now be spotted on menus in fashionable restaurants as far away as New York City. In just a couple of decades, an ingredient that tickled the fancy of one island nation has become a condiment with a global "kick."

How *Kimch'i* was Born

The battle to globalize *kimch'i*, the fiery relish of pickled vegetables, has taken quite a different form. Japan and South Korea, longtime rival powers separated by a narrow strait, have been duking it out for world supremacy in the export market for this finished and ready-to-eat product.

In Korea, its true homeland, *kimch'i* is a fixture of the national diet. Koreans eat it with most meals, either as a basic accompaniment to rice or as a cooking ingredient for hotpots, stuffed noodles and other dishes. In South Korea today, *kimch'i* accounts for some 12.5% of adults' average daily food intake, by weight. Dozens of varieties exist, but the classic *kimch'i* is dominated by the greenish-white hues of *napa* cabbage and the glaring red of hot chili pepper.

Koreans routinely prepare this relish at home. They trim the cabbages and immerse them in salty water for 10 hours to soften. Meanwhile, they make a chopped "stuffing," typically of scallions, parsley, mustard greens, *daikon* radish, garlic, ginger, ground chilies, seaweed, and *chotkal* (a paste of fermented shrimp, anchovies and croaker). This mixture is stuffed among the leaves of the wilted cabbage heads, which are then tightly bound with string before being packed in jars of brine. The large ceramic crocks are stored in special underground *kimch'i* cellars and sheds, or on roofs. Depending on the temperature and salt content, the pickling process takes between one day and several weeks. If fermentation is continued too long, the relish becomes unpalatably sour.

Tastes vary regionally within Korea. In many versions, the *napa* is replaced by *bok choi* (celery cabbage), turnip, or cucumber. In the colder north, less salt is needed to retard spoilage during pickling. Thus, northerners tend to prefer varieties of *kimch'i* that use less salt, chili and *chotkal*; in these, the sweetness of the vegetables is most apparent.

Surprisingly, such key ingredients as *napa*, chilies, and seafood were absent from the early history of *kimch'i*. The word itself, a Korean one, is believed to be derived from *shimchae* ("salting of vegetables"), and the first manuscripts to mention *kimch'i* referred simply to brined pickles such as cucumber, radish, leek, or eggplant. Such references appeared in the 7th Century, when Korea was being unified under the Silla kingdom with help from the T'ang dynasty in China. It appears that this early *kimch'i* was simply a Korean adaptation of the Chinese winter-pickling tradition. Throughout Northeast Asia at that time, salting away vegetables for the harsh winters, when fresh produce became unavailable, was an important defense against hunger and

continued on next page

TWO FIRECRACKERS *continued from previous page*

vitamin deficiency. Crops of *kimch'i* would be buried in the ground to keep them through the winter at the optimal temperature, several degrees above freezing.

A surviving legacy of this seasonal tradition is *kimjang*, a feverish period of mass *kimch'i*-making in preparation for the coldest 3-4 months of winter. In Korean cities each year at *kimjang*, vast temporary vegetable markets suddenly sprout up, where a single family might purchase 200 or more heads of cabbage. Neighbors and relatives then help one another in the arduous task of pickling the vegetables, a remnant of the peasant tradition of *pumasi* (mutual assistance).

To Each His Own Relish

What one could call "the middle period" of *kimch'i* evolution was taking shape by the 13th Century as new spices and seasonings were added, and the relish became a year-round rather than winter-only food. In the course of the wars in 1231-58 that led to the conquest of Korea by Mongols from China, government minister Kyubo Lee wrote that "turnip pickled in a soy sauce is good to eat during summer, while turnip dipped in salty water is good to eat during winter." Similarly, a medical text described two types of *kimch'i* made from radishes: *jang-a-jji* was preserved in soy sauce, and *soonmoo-sogumjeri* in brine. By this time, the salting of fish had also emerged as a high art on the Korean peninsula. Adding bits of briny seafood to the pickling jar not only promoted fermentation but enhanced the protein component and the flavor of *kimch'i*. Although preserved seafood was still an expensive ingredient that only the wealthy could afford, it would prove to be an enduring and distinctly Korean contribution to the pickled vegetable tradition.

Mahayana Buddhism became prevalent in Korea under the Koryo Dynasty (936-1392). Some of the monks even became politicians and courtiers. In this religion, not only the discipline of celibacy but also the disciplined preparation of food plays an important role in the spiritual path toward *nirvana*, the extinction of desire and suffering. Monks were thus expected to prepare their own food, mindful of the doctrine that onions, garlic and other pungent vegetables arouse desire, while eating the remains of dead fish arouses anger. A special "temple" *kimch'i* thus evolved whose seasoning relied on alternative ingredients like soy sauce, ginger, and extracts from peanuts, pinenuts, or wild sesame.

The addition of hot chilies was the turning point toward modern *kimch'i*. Portuguese merchants and missionaries had introduced this New World spice to Japan in the late 1500s (interestingly, *tempura* was another food tradition they brought at the same time). The Japanese invaded Korea in 1592, and the chili pepper soon followed. But it was another century and a half before it was added to *kimch'i*, first recorded in 1766. Finally, in the 1800s, the last of the major popular ingredients arrived with the introduction of the *napa* cabbage to Korea from China, where it had been cultivated for over a thousand years.

It's interesting to compare the resulting form of *kimch'i* with similar cabbage pickles on the Asian mainland. In northeast China today, notably in the area around Tientsin, there is still a practice of preserving *napa* in brine, but without the red pepper and fermented seafood of the Korean tradition. The Tientsin cabbages are sliced into small chunks and packed into jars with salt, garlic and other spices. The finished pickles are added to hot soups, stir-fries and other dishes.

By contrast, the *kimch'i* that emerged in 19th-Century Korea was complex and refined. It even had a place on the banquet tables of the royal court in Hanyang, the capital (modern Seoul). There, huge feasts were held in court pavilions where diners were treated to musical performances. Meal preparations spared no expense, from natural ice preserved in special warehouses, to elaborate seasonings like *kochujang*, a chili paste. The latter is typically made from sticky rice, malt, pulverized blocks of dried soybean meal, and chili powder, forming a gruel that is fermented for over three months. *Kochujang* was first introduced to the royal court for use at an 1848 feast marking the 60th birthday of the queen mother.

A cookbook from this time lists a recipe for *jutkukji*, one of three main types of *kimch'i* served at the royal court. The recipe calls for *napa* and *daikon* to be washed well, cut into chunks and salted, then mixed with a chopped stuffing of chilies, garlic, *gat* (mustard greens), *minari* (the dropwort herb, *Filipendula vulgaris*), and seaweed. Fermented fish are then boiled in water and cooled before being added to the mixture, which is finally transferred to a clay pot and stored for fermentation.

Also frequently served to the kings were two other types of *kimch'i* called *kkaktugi* and *dongchimi*, both still popular in Korea today. In these versions, cabbages were not used, and radishes tended to play the key role. For *dongchimi*, sometimes translated as "water *kimch'i*," a larger quantity of brine was put in the pickling jars, and the resulting juice was savored in its own right. King Kojong, who ruled Korea between 1864 and 1907, was reputed to enjoy winter-night meals featuring a dish of traditional cold buckwheat noodles, served in a mixture of chilled beef broth and the juice of a special *dongchimi* made from crisp Asian pears rather than radishes.

Making *Kimch'i* for the World

War and emigration, more than anything else, have helped spread the taste for *kimch'i* from Korea to the rest of the world. One of the first countries "infected" with the craze was Japan, whose troops occupied Korea from 1910 until the end of World War 2.

During the Korean War of the early 1950s, *kimch'i* was available to South Korean forces and to their U.S. allies at the front. Some of the troops, however, suffered food poisoning from this very perishable food. The American GIs were soon banned from eating it, while the Koreans were re-provisioned thanks to a canning process developed by a

continued on page 10

C.H.A.A. HAWAIIAN LUAU

C3

ONO ONO !

by Carroll Thomson

Carroll Thomson is Program Director and new President of CHAA (see page 11).

The weather for our Hawaiian *luau* on July 22 was glorious and hot. The yard of Sherry Sundling's home in Chelsea, MI had been beautifully decorated with flowers, fish nets, shells, banana-leaf placemats and even a bubbling brook with fish. We were each given a *lei* or two to wear around the neck, and tropical punch to sip out of coconut-shell cups.

Ono is the Hawaiian word for "delicious," and delicious our meal was! To research it, we had scoured libraries from Ann Arbor to Farmington Hills, peered through web pages, and even dug up a publication from 1938. No slouches in this group! Our recipes were drawn from such books as *The Food of Paradise* (1996) by Rachel Laudan, who had spoken to our group in October 1996; *Remembering Diamond Head, Remembering Hawaii* (1999) by CHAA members Shirley Tong Parola and Lisa Parola Gaynier; *Sam Choy's Island Flavors* (1999) by the well-known chef at Breakfast, Lunch and Crab in Honolulu; Jan Longone's copy of *Hawaiian Cook Book* (1938) by Helen Alexander; as well as the Internet and many, many other sources.

This was the CHAA's 15th annual picnic. It was generally agreed that our participatory theme meals keep getting better and more authentic all the time, owing to the fact that they have been approached in quite a serious way by the members.

A Meal to Rival King Kamehameha's

The *luau* is a traditional Polynesian feast offered to thank the gods following the successful completion of a sea voyage, home construction or other important task, or in celebration of a wedding, birthday or other joyous event. A *luau* might last for several days. Perhaps the most famous one was given by King Kamehameha III on Restoration Day, July 31, 1843. The estimated 10,000 natives and visitors attending this feast reportedly consumed 271 hogs, 482 large calabashes of *poi*, 662 chickens, 3 whole oxen, 2 barrels of salt pork, 3125 salt fish, 1820 fresh fish, and 180 squid.

Our own feast commenced at 5:00 p.m. when our hostesses began offering various types of *pupu*, or little snacks. There was *rumaki* (chicken livers and water chestnuts wrapped in bacon, marinated in soy sauce and cooked); chicken *yakitori* (grilled kabobs of chicken, green pepper and onion, marinated in soy sauce, sugar and Japanese cooking wine); beef *teriyaki* (marinated beef strips on skewers); baked Maui chicken wings; sesame meatballs (no meat at all, but plenty of *tofu*, ginger, soy sauce, green onions, sesame seeds, garlic, and rice vinegar); and tropical fruit kabobs. Wow! and these were just the appetizers!

We were even more impressed by the grand appearance of our *kalua pua'a* (roasted pig). He was a fine specimen, surrounded by flowers and ferns and wearing a *lei*. The traditional way to roast such a pig would be to dig an underground pit oven, or *imu*. The men would clean the pig, then fill its abdominal cavity with lava stones that had been baking in the *imu*. The carcass would then be lowered into the heated pit; bananas, breadfruit and sweet potatoes would often be thrown in as well. The whole thing would be covered with *ti* leaves (the long green leaves that *hula* skirts are traditionally made from) or banana leaves. A mat would then be spread over the pit and covered with earth. After 3-6 hours, the well-roasted pig and the perfectly done fruits and vegetables would be dug up, and the feast would begin, the Hawaiians sitting on the ground on *lau hala* mats woven from pandanus leaves, and eating with their fingers from wooden bowls. Nowadays in Hawaii, a *luau* pig is often wrapped in wire mesh to help keep it intact as it roasts, and the pit is covered with burlap. The diners sit on pillows and eat from long, low tables.

Along with the roasted pig, our Hot Buffet also included chicken long rice, which is made not with rice grains but rice noodles ("cellophane" noodles) soaked and cut into 8-inch strips—the chicken is simmered in ginger and water, the noodles added in the last few minutes of cooking to absorb the broth. There was also coconut chicken; baked *mahi mahi*, a popular Polynesian fish; *poi palau*, a sweet potato *poi* contributed by Jan Longone; fried plantains; candied sweet potatoes; mixed vegetables; and jasmine rice with orange, onion, red pepper, apple and basil.

Poi was the staple of the original Hawaiian diet. It was normally made with the tuber known to us as colocasia or *taro* (the latter a Polynesian word), although yams, sweet potatoes or other starchy plants were used when *taro* was unavailable. *Taro*, first grown as far back as 7,000 years ago in South and Southeast Asia, had eventually spread from there to China and Japan, thence to the Pacific Islands. The Hawaiian natives believed that *taro* was the first—and man the second—child of the union of Father Sky and Daughter Earth; the sacred plants were cultivated by men only, women not being allowed to touch them. (This was an instance of *kapu*, a code of rules segregating Hawaiian men and women in many aspects of preparing and eating food.) Once harvested, the *taro* was baked in an *imu*, then pounded with stone on a wooden board, and moistened with water to become a palatable, mildly sweet paste. The *poi* ferments as it ages, becoming thicker and sour.

Our Cold Buffet featured *lomi lomi* salmon, a traditional *luau* dish of raw salmon which is marinated with salt, then diced with sweet onions and tomatoes. We also munched on Hawaiian salsa; mango salsa with mint, red pepper, ginger and hot pepper; sesame spinach salad; Thai cucumber salad; a papaya, mango and kiwi bisque with a hint of ginger; mango bread; and a fresh fruit platter.

Desserts (can you believe we could still eat more?) included a fruit compote; two types of *haupia* (coconut pudding)—one firm and sliced into cubes, another soft with a mango garnish; butter *mochi*, a sweet cake made with glu-

continued on next page

ONO ONO !

continued from previous page

tinous rice flour, coconut, eggs and butter; and banana cake *waiale iki*.

Then, all of our brains were put to work on a quiz written by member Ann Fowler, with assistance from Don Fowler, Jan and Dan Longone, and the *World Almanac*. What with the heat of the sun and the incredible food, it was rather hard to concentrate! But I think we were all amazed that *taro*, along with yams, bananas, pigs and chickens, were all introduced to Hawaii by the seagoing Asians who originally settled the islands around 450 CE. By contrast, the pineapple, which we think of as quintessentially Hawaiian, was a New World fruit only transplanted to Hawaii by a Spanish adventurer in 1790.

We were also impressed that the Parker cattle ranch, on the Big Island, was founded back in 1847, and that it grew to 227,000 acres, the largest privately-owned ranch in the world. The early introduction of cattle (in 1793) helps account for many Hawaiian dishes such as beef stew, beef curry, oxtail soup, beef *teriyaki* and beef *hekka* (*sukiyaki*). (For Shirley Tong Parola's discussion of these and other varied influences on Hawaiian food, see *Repast* Spring 2000 pp. 3-5, and Spring 2001 p. 10). By the way, our quiz winner Doris Miller was awarded a cookbook, not the head of the pig (nor did the loser get the tail!).

Just completing all of our recipe research and fantastic cooking was a feat worthy of a *luau* celebration! In addition to "thanking the gods," we thank all of the humans who participated, many bringing two or three dishes, and all of them prepared to perfection. We feel especially grateful to Sherry Sundling for her efforts, her hospitality, and her enthusiasm, and to the planning committee for their hard work in organizing such a memorable meal. ■

Sources for the article "Two Firecrackers of the Far East"

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TWO FIRECRACKERS

continued from page 8

group of microbiologists. One of that group, a woman named Kim Man Jo, later led in the development of factories producing *kimch'i* rations for South Korean soldiers in the Vietnam War, and in the late 1980s she began to export a "kosher" brand of *kimch'i* to New York.

Flavor and texture have tended to suffer when *kimch'i* is commercially packaged, usually in glass jars, for shipment over long distances. Yet this product has helped sustain large immigrant communities of Koreans in cities like New York, Los Angeles, Honolulu, Tokyo and Peking. Some 97% of Korean *kimch'i* exports go to Japan, where the food is now enjoyed routinely even by many non-Koreans. However, many Japanese and other non-Koreans find the flavor or odor of traditional *kimch'i* too intense, and a milder Japanese adaptation has gained favor. This version of *kimch'i*, or *kimuchi* in Japanese, is typically made with *napa* cabbage that is not fermented in brine but instead soaked in vinegar, soy sauce and sweeteners; it also lacks garlic, chili, scallions and *chotkal*. Ironically, this Japanese knock-off now accounts for about 75% of global *kimch'i* sales outside of Korea.

But producers in Seoul are fighting back hard to grab a larger share of the rapidly expanding market. Their strategy is to export *kimch'i* that is basically traditional, yet tailored to international tastes. At Doosan Food Business, a team led by Kim Sun Young, a microbiologist on leave from the University of Wisconsin, has developed a jar of *kimch'i* with a long shelf life and virtually no odor. At the Cheil Jedang Corp., a rival team led by Kim Man Jo (mentioned earlier) has added Kimchi Salsa, Kraut Kimchi, and Crunch Oriental to the company's export product line. The commercial viability of these new Korean products was boosted by a ruling this July from the Rome-based Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC). The CAC, created in 1962 jointly by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), sets food standards that are used in international trade agreements. After several years of deliberation, the CAC this summer established standards for *kimch'i* that will effectively bar Japanese *kimuchi* from being sold internationally under that name. Government officials in Seoul now speak of their country becoming "the world's sole *kimch'i* power."

Very commonly in the past, the advent of new technologies has hastened the disappearance of traditional foods. But perhaps the story will not be so simple for such a complex fermented product as *kimch'i*, for new methods of packaging and refrigeration could conceivably have the effect of increasing the availability of "the real thing." In fact, in South Korea today, more and more urban households are being equipped with specially designed *kimch'i* refrigerators. Using the LCD display panels on these high-tech devices, people can program the temperatures needed to advance or retard fermentation of different types of *kimch'i*, as well as download recipes from the Internet.

The future of *kimch'i* and *wasabi* is not yet written—for these two firecrackers from the Far East, it seems that the sky is the limit! ■

MORSELS & TIDBITS

Carroll Thomson has stepped forward to assume the post of CHAA President, following two years of exemplary service by Margot Michael. Carroll has been an active and important member of our organization for several years, most recently as Program Chair. For the past year, she has also served as a docent at the William L. Clements Library (University of Michigan), helping to research and organize its collection of culinary advertising ephemera, particularly in children-related foods such as gelatins and cereals. Formerly, Carroll operated a series of food-related establishments in Ann Arbor: Carroll's Corner, Complete Cuisine, and the Trellis Café & Tearoom. Her compilation *In the Kitchen With Carroll* includes many recipes from those years (see *Repast* Summer 1999, p. 11). Carroll and her husband John Thomson have graciously hosted several CHAA participatory theme meals at their home.

Longtime CHAA members Yvonne and Bill Lockwood have been honored as the recipients of the prestigious Sophie Coe Prize in Food History for 2001. The prize, which carries an award of £1000, is given annually for an outstanding essay on some aspect of food history, as determined by an international panel of judges under the auspices of the Oxford Symposium on Food History. The Lockwoods were recognized for their joint essay "Continuity and Adaptation in Arab American Foodways," recently published in a volume edited by Nabeel Abraham and Andrew Shryock, *Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream* (see *Repast* Fall 2000, p. 2). In praising the work, the panel wrote: "This essay examines the cuisine of four groups of Arab Americans to find out how and to what extent they come to identify themselves as a single social group. By looking at foods in what the authors term the public sector—restaurants, grocers, bakeries, butchers and other food purveyors—and in the private sector of home kitchens, they conclude that changes occur more rapidly in the former rather than the latter. The Lockwoods' work on this important subject offers a methodology that can be applied to other groups in other places." Congratulations to Bill and Yvonne!

Our member Sherry Sundling is profiled in an article by Rachel Urist, "Making a New Life as a Kosher Caterer" in the August 2001 issue of the *Ann Arbor Observer*. Urist's article is a fascinating glimpse at Sherry's cooking career, from her early years as assistant to Viennese chef Charity Suczek, through her lengthy stint as a food service supervisor at the University of Michigan, and on to her continuing work as a busy caterer for Congregation Beth Israel. Sherry spoke to our group this past May on the subject, "Apple Brown Betty to Tiramisu: The Evolution of America's University Dining Service," and she hosted our Hawaiian *luau* in July (see page 9).

Jack Kugelmass, an anthropologist and director of Jewish studies at Arizona State University, is scheduled to deliver a lecture, "Interpreting a Jewish Meal: An Anthropological Excursion to a Jewish Restaurant," at 7:30 pm on October 22, Congregation Beth Shalom in Oak Park, MI. Dr. Kugelmass has conducted extensive research on both Eastern European and American Jews. His lecture is co-sponsored by Wayne State University.

How did the banana, which can't even be grown in the continental United States, rise to become quite possibly the most highly craved fruit in America today? To answer this question is the central goal of Virginia Scott Jenkins in her recent publication, *Bananas: An American History* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000; 232pp., \$16.95 paper). Gina, who serves as treasurer of our sister organization CHoW (Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C.), is a scholar-in-residence at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum. Her book is a loving history of America's love of bananas, but it ranges widely to examine the evolution of trade networks for shipping the fruits northward out of the tropics; the impact of domestic advertising and public health campaigns on consumer attitudes; shifts in diet and nutritional standards; and the varied status of the banana in American music and popular culture.

The Jenkins work on the banana was part of a vigorous publication schedule undertaken by the Smithsonian Institution in the area of food history. Books appearing so far in the year 2001 alone have included:

Alison J. Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastics in 1950s America* (256pp., \$16.95 paper)

Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden, eds., *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power* (440pp., \$29.95 paper)

Andrew F. Smith, *Pure Ketchup: A History of America's National Condiment* (242pp., \$16.95 paper)

Andrew F. Smith, *Popped Culture: A Social History of Popcorn in America* (263pp., \$16.95 paper)

In addition, the Smithsonian's Anacostia Museum has an interesting new website, "Still Cookin' by the Fireside: African-Americans in Food Service" (<http://www.si.edu/anacostia/food/>). Using archival photos and narratives, the web pages summarize the hardships faced, and the contributions made, by Black cooks, chefs, and food entrepreneurs in various facets of national life including the Colonial Era, After the Civil War, Caterers and Hoteliers, Cooks and Vendors, Migrations and Urbanization, Urban Life, and Regional Influences. An extensive bibliography is also included.

CHAA CALENDAR

(All programs are scheduled for 4-6pm unless otherwise noted.
All programs are at Walden Hills Community Room unless otherwise noted.)

September 16

The Docents Speak: The Making of a
Culinary Archive, Clements Library,
University of Michigan

October 21

(Matthaei Botanical Gardens)
Tour and talk by Elizabeth Elling,
Coordinator of Visiting Programs:
"Plants and Herbs of the New World"

November 18

Wendy Esko:
History of Eden Foods and the
popularity of Japanese ingredients

December 16

(4-7pm)
Holiday participatory dinner,
The World on a Finger: Spanish
Tapas

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