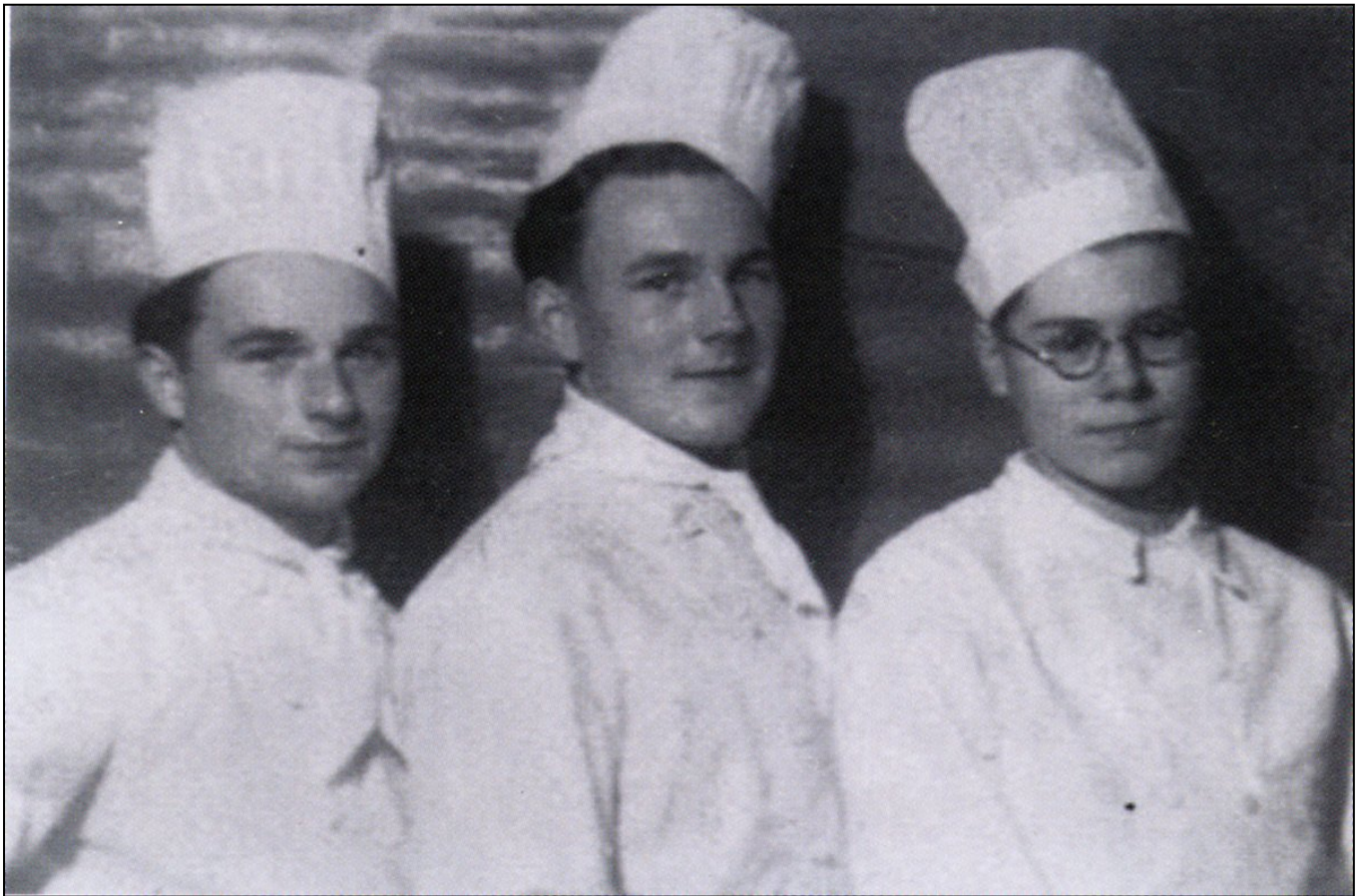


A Remembrance of Things Past

Reminiscences of Chefs and Other Food Professionals



The Austrian-born Arno Schmidt (right) with other young chefs in Europe, late 1940s. Chef Schmidt later emigrated to New York, where he was eventually Executive Chef of the Waldorf Astoria. See his reminiscence on page 3.

Photo from Arno Schmidt, *Peeking Behind the Wallpaper: The Gilded Age of Hotel Dining* (2012), accessed via "Host to the World" website, <http://www.hosttotheworld.com/omeka/exhibits/show/staff/item/954>.

THE SAUSAGE IN GERMANY (AND ELSEWHERE)

Robert Neil MacGregor, director of the British Museum since 2002, curated a popular 2014-15 exhibit there entitled “Germany: Memories of a Nation”, accompanied by a book of the same title from Knopf. In a technique made famous by his earlier best-seller, *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (also a BBC Radio series), he uses a specific object— or sometimes a person, place, or idea— as an entrée to a broad theme: e.g., the Brandenburg Gate to explore Germany’s geopolitical position, the crown of Charlemagne to explore the Holy Roman Empire, and the Gutenberg press to explore German craftsmanship.



Photo from Berlin in October 2013 by Suzanne Kaplan of Birmingham, MI

For exploring German diversity, MacGregor’s entrée is the sausage. Under the title “One People, Many Sausages”, he notes that Germany has an astonishing 1,200 different types, each representing a particular strand of history and culture. In Bavaria, for example, there is *weisswurst* (white sausage), traditionally made with minced veal and bacon. A fresh sausage made without preservatives, *weisswurst* had to be eaten the same morning it was made; still today, Bavarians seldom eat it after noon. Also noteworthy is the frankfurter, originally a luxury item marking the coronation of a Holy Roman Emperor. In Frankfurt from the 1500s onwards, these local *Frankfurter* sausages were made from the finest mincemeat and used to stuff a celebratory ox roasted in the main city square. Even the more recently invented varieties of sausage have interesting origins. The *currywurst*, to which an entire museum in Berlin is devoted, arose there amid the postwar deprivations of the late 1940s, when residents began to spice up the inferior sausages of the time by sprinkling curry powder on them and serving them sliced with ketchup.

MacGregor, a highly respected art historian who has nourished a fascination with German culture since his childhood years in Glasgow, stepped down from his British Museum post last December to supervise the new Humboldtforum, a nonprofit foundation in Berlin promoting exploration of the multi-layered relationships between Germany and the rest of the world.

Of course, German food traditions encompass far more than sausages, and that is one of the themes of Berlin-based writer Ursula Heinzelman’s *Beyond Bratwurst: A History of Food in Germany* (Reaktion Books, 2015). Conversely, there are dozens of other nations with extensive sausage traditions. In that light, we mention:

- *Sausage: A Global History* (Reaktion Books, 2015), a concise summary by Gary Allen, who teaches food culture and writing at SUNY Empire State College in Saratoga Springs, NY.
- *English Sausages* (Prospect Books, 2015) by London food writer Jan Davison. The book includes chapters on the sausages of Roman England; English fresh sausages; regional fresh sausages; white puddings and hog’s puddings; black puddings; and smoked and other preserved sausages; plus about 100 recipes. ■

Repast

ISSN 1552-8863

Published quarterly by the
Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor (CHAA)
<http://culinaryhistoriansannarbor.org/>

An archive is available at <http://cooks.aadl.org/cooks/repast>

Editor.....Randy K. Schwartz
CHAA Presidents.....Joanne Nesbit and Judy Steeh
CHAA Program Chair.....Laura Green Gillis
CHAA Treasurer.....Dan Longone
CHAA Membership SecretaryMarionette Cano
CHAA Website Editor.....Judy Steeh
CHAA Founder and Honorary President...Jan Longone



*The material contained in this publication is copyrighted.
Passages may be copied or quoted provided that the source is credited.*

For submissions or inquiries about *Repast*, contact:

Randy K. Schwartz
1044 Greenhills Drive
Ann Arbor, MI 48105-2722
tel. 734-662-5040
rschw45251@aol.com

Subscriptions are \$20/year. To subscribe to *Repast* or to become a CHAA member (which includes a subscription), contact one of our Co-Presidents:

M. Joanne Nesbit and Judy Steeh
tel: 734-213-2412 / 734-665-5813
a2culinaryhistorians@gmail.com

Or download a membership form from the web address given near the top of this box.

FRESH FOOD IN WAR-TORN AUSTRIA

by Arno Schmidt

*Arno Schmidt served as Executive Chef of the Waldorf Astoria New York from 1969 to 1979. There, he supervised the enormous 1976 Bicentennial dinners with world leaders in attendance. Chef Schmidt, who owns an immense menu collection dating back to 1903, has worked in kitchens in eight countries, including at the Grand Royal Hotel in Stockholm, the Hotel Victoria in Zermatt, Switzerland, and the Regency and St. Regis Hotels in New York. He lives in Jackson Heights, NY, and is a member of the Culinary Historians of New York and of the Big Apple Chapter of the American Culinary Federation, where he was President between 2008 and 2011. Among the several books he has published is a memoir, *Peeking Behind the Wallpaper: The Gilded Age of Hotel Dining* (2012).*

There was no decisive moment when I decided to become a cook. It was an evolution starting in my early childhood. I liked helping my mother in the kitchen. My mother was a good cook. When she became engaged to marry, in order to hone her cooking skills she worked *pro bono* for a few months in a parish kitchen in a small village in the Austrian Alps. Feeding a family that grew eventually to seven people was a challenge because her kitchen was small and the equipment primitive. When she made Strudel, the dough was pulled on the extended dining-room table.

There was a political influence in my career choice. Youth activities consisted of marching after the Nazi flag and chanting martial songs. Influenced by my Catholic parents, I hated it and preferred to stay home cooking.

Farm-to-table food was normal in Austria— then Germany— during World War 2. Directly below our windows in central Salzburg was the farmer's market. We had no refrigerator, so shopping there and at stores within walking distance was a daily routine. It started with going to the cheese store on the square to get milk, which was ladled out of large cans and carefully measured according to the rationing coupon. The grocery store next to our building sold basic groceries from open containers, and individually weighed each purchase.

Stores were specialized; bakers made bread but no pastry, and the butcher shop carried only meat and sausages. There was even a store that sold only products derived from bees, namely honey, candles, and gingerbread.

One more influence guided me to my path into commercial kitchens. My mother subscribed to a food magazine. It had photographs of glorious food displays at culinary exhibitions, and these beautiful pictures appealed to my artistic sense while growing up surrounded by stunning churches and palaces. I loved to read stories about famous hotels from all over the world, and I was intrigued by reading about the large steamships and their luxurious dining rooms.

When I finally started apprenticeship in Austria in 1946, two weeks shy of turning 15, my mind was set on becoming a professional cook. It was based on love of fresh food. Travel, and learn languages along the way. Don't waste anything. Learn as much as you can and keep your mind open. ■



Executive Chef
Arno Schmidt
at the Waldorf
Astoria New
York.

Photo from Waldorf Astoria
Archive, accessed via "Host
to the World" website,
<http://www.hosttotheworld.com/omeka/items/show/953>

My MAN'OUSHE MISSION

by Maureen Abood

Maureen Abood is author of the Lebanese cookbook Rose Water & Orange Blossoms and maintains a blog of the same name (<http://www.maureenabood.com/>). She was born and raised in Lansing, MI, where her father Camille and his brother Fredric headed the prominent law firm Abood & Abood. In 2010 she left her job as Chief Development Officer of the St. Jude League (a Catholic missionary organization based in Chicago) to attend Tante Marie's Cooking School in San Francisco, CA. After graduating, she moved back to Michigan, where she makes a living as a writer and divides her time between the Lansing and Petoskey areas. The following excerpt is reprinted with permission from Rose Water & Orange Blossoms (Philadelphia, PA: Running Press, a member of the Perseus Books Group), © 2015.

My brother Chris was the first to speak to me of the *man'oushe*. Every time he returned from a trip to Lebanon, I wanted to sit him down and discuss, in detail, every bite of food he'd eaten. He was happy to oblige, but nothing he described, even the elaborate meals with family and more family, made his eyes go wide like the *man'oushe*. It's street-corner bakery food, he said. You get it wrapped in paper and off you go. They'd stopped on a whim because they were hungry and needed a snack, and it turned out to be the best Lebanese food he'd ever put in his mouth. The flatbread was chewy, but with a crisp exterior. It was blistered (okay, my word, not his) and warm, topped with *za'atar** or cheese, filled with tomatoes and pink pickled turnips and mint and folded over on itself.

I had to stop him. I couldn't take it.

Breads like this were not unfamiliar to me; I'd had them before. But those were breads that came in plastic bags.

No matter how fresh they say the bread is, it's still bread that you get in a plastic bag. Warm-from-the-oven *man'oushe* is something bread dreams are made of, something you are only going to get from your own kitchen.

To say my list of must-eat foods was lengthy when I visited Lebanon myself is an understatement. So when Day 2 of the trip commenced and I still hadn't eaten my *man'oushe*, I began to feel anxious. We started the day with breakfast in



Photo courtesy of Maureen Abood

the hotel, which was a beautiful breakfast to behold, but not a *man'oushe* breakfast.

Our first stop that day was American University at Beirut, an oasis in the city surrounded by a stone wall and plenty of security. Stepping through the gates and onto the quad on that sunny morning took my breath away—for the views out over the sea, for the architecture and the massive trees everywhere, for the thoughts of my great-uncle, a dean at the school who had kept a correspondence with my father long ago.

But also, and perhaps primarily, I found the students breathtaking. I have never been in a place where most everyone looks like a cousin, or a sister, or ... me. And there, through the window of an unreachable student union building, I saw rows and rows of *man'oushe* waiting for the students to scoop them up to have with their orange juice, sustenance for the day.

By the time we reached our next destination to meet our family in the village of El Mtein, I thought *man'oushe* would have to be tabled to a Day 3 obsession. Then my cousin suggested an out-of-the-way place for lunch, up even higher in the hills, a casual spot whose specialty is a very flat, God bless it, *man'oushe*.

It's his favorite, he said, his very favorite food to eat. Our bread there was topped with the classic *kwarma*, preserved lamb, confit-style; we also had *labneh*** and cheese on our

* A type of dried leaf used as an herb, usually either wild thyme or mountain oregano.

** A form of yogurt strained to remove the whey, thus thick and spreadable.

breads, and alongside there were chickpeas and fava beans doused in good olive oil, black olives, and the requisite whole tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, and mint.

Holy Grail. Holy day. Holy moly. I vowed I would learn that bread, and that day came one snowy Winter morning when I was back up north in Michigan. Under the guidebook of Barbara Abdeni Massaad, a devotee who wrote and photographed an entire beautiful book about Lebanese *man'oushe*, I've been turning breads out in the kind of feverish excitement that comes with reaching the summit of one's quest. I had to call my brother and tell him about the chewiness, the blistering beauty, the *za'atar* warm from the oven.

But he had to stop me. He just couldn't take it. ■

Man'oushe
topped with
za'atar.

Photo by
Jason Varney
from
Maureen Abood,
*Rose Water &
Orange
Blossoms*.



FINDING MYSELF AT THE DEL RIO

by Sara Moulton

The well-known chef Sara Moulton currently hosts a public TV show, “Sara’s Weeknight Meals”, and writes a weekly recipe and column for the Associated Press called “KitchenWise”. She founded the New York Women’s Culinary Alliance (1982) and was employed as Executive Chef at Gourmet magazine (1989-2009), as Food Editor of ABC-TV’s “Good Morning America” (1997-2012), and as a host on the Food TV Network (1996-2005). Sara lives in New York City with her husband, Bill Adler, whom she met in Ann Arbor. She completed her B.A. degree in intellectual history at the Univ. of Michigan in 1974.

I went to Ann Arbor in the Fall of 1970 for several reasons: to get away from home, to go to college, and to follow a boyfriend. But I didn’t have a clue about what I might do after college. Vaguely imagining I would figure out a career one way or another, I ended up dabbling in a succession of different fields— medicine (and, later, biological medical illustration), the law, and education. But none of those professions seemed quite right.

What I didn’t notice— or didn’t take seriously— was that I always had some kind of job in the food industry. I spent a school year cooking dinner for a pair of married professors and their two young children. I slung burgers at the Half-Way Inn, a cozy little hang-out for students that operated out of the basement of the university’s East Quad, which is where I lived for my first year on campus. And I waitressed at the Olympic Restaurant, a Greek eatery on the corner of Main Street and Miller [currently the site of The Broken Egg restaurant], often on the graveyard shift (10pm – 7am) on Friday and Saturday nights.

A year after graduating, I’d settled into a cooking gig at the Del Rio Bar, when it finally struck me— *this* is sorta fun. In truth, it wasn’t just about the gig. Ann Arbor in the Seventies was a wonderful place to be, the famously enlightened college town having evolved into one of the country’s most high-energy hippie communities.

The Del Rio itself was a funky little oasis downtown on the corner of Washington and Ashley [a site currently part of the Grizzly Peak brewpub], exactly the kind of place that gave Ann Arbor a good name. A small-ish room with large windows, it boasted a bar that ran the length of one wall and a tiny kitchen in the back. Other than making drinks for the customers (and supplying shots to the workers at various strategic moments as the evening wore on), it was the bartender’s job to program the music. Most nights the default selection was the soundtrack to “The Harder They Come”. On weekends there was live jazz. Operationally, the place was run as a democracy, with all decisions made by the Del Rio Community. It felt like one big family.

The menu was nothing fancy: burgers, chili, Greek salads, and soup. The soup was the only item that wasn’t made according to a specific recipe. Neal Lau, who preceded me in the kitchen, taught me the basics. Every soup was built in a stockpot from the bottom up. The first layer was always onions, which needed to be cooked low and slow. Then came the garlic, also cooked low and slow... and be careful not to burn it. Then it was time to add the ingredient of the day, whatever it was: broccoli, potatoes, tomatoes, carrots, etc.

As noted, however, this wasn’t exactly fine dining. Every soup contained “soup base”, a concentrated shelf-stable paste (it was likely 99% salt) that came in chicken, beef, and vegetarian flavors and needed to be diluted with water. After dumping in the soup paste, I could add the seasonings of my choice from our dazzling selection of dried herbs. (Fresh herbs were a rumor to us then.) Neal also taught me about finishing the soup using lemon juice as a brightener, a sweet little trick that’s stuck with me to this day. Point is, making soup allowed for at least a little creativity. It may be my imagination, but I seem to remember that *my* soups were very popular.



Staff gathered in front of the Del Rio for a snapshot in the early 1970s, including Sara Moulton (lower right) and co-owners Rick Burgess (just behind her), Ernie Harburg (upper right), and Torry Harburg (middle of back row, looking to the right). Photo by then-waiter Larry Behnke, via *Ann Arbor Chronicle* (Nov. 10, 2009).

I enjoyed cooking at the Del Rio so much that when the bar's owners started talking about opening up a new restaurant/jazz club on the other side of Washington Street— it became The Earle— I nominated myself as the chef. No dice, they told me. I'd have to get some real training first. I wasn't terribly crushed. I was happy enough to continue cooking at the Del Rio and living with my boyfriend. (This was not the same young man I'd moved to Ann Arbor to join.)

Turns out that my mother was more ambitious for me than I was for myself. Without informing me, she wrote separate letters to Craig Claiborne and Julia Child, asking them what her dear daughter should do if she wanted to pursue a career as a chef. Craig wrote her back. I should go to cooking school, he said, either the Hotel School in Lausanne or the Culinary Institute of America. I didn't like the idea of traveling all the way to Switzerland, so I applied to the CIA, confident that they'd never accept me because I didn't even know how to use a chef's knife. But to my amazement, the CIA said, "Congrats. You're in."

Oh no! I didn't really want to disrupt my happy little life. So I went to The Boyfriend and asked him whether I should leave him to go to cooking school... hoping he'd say, "Please don't do it, dear! I can't live without you!" In fact, he said, "Yes, please go. It'll give me a chance to see other women."

Well! *That* shot me out of Ann Arbor like a cannon, and it might have been the best thing that ever happened to me. On my very first day at the CIA, I wondered why the heck I'd waited so long to make this move. I was in absolute heaven, set on the path I'd follow for the rest of my life.

I have no idea if I would have stumbled on that path if it hadn't been for the Del Rio (and my mom). I loved the vibe there, the camaraderie, the complementary pleasures of good food and good music. It was, in a word, *hospitable*, and it persuaded me that the hospitality business was the business for me.

P.S. Whatever happened to The Boyfriend Who Kissed Me Off? Reader, I married him. ■



Sara Moulton and Julia Child at Sara's family's farm in Massachusetts in July 1984. Sara had begun working for Julia in 1979 in conjunction with the show, "Julia Child and More Company". Photo by Bill Adler.

EARLY PLAYPENS

by Jeremiah Tower

Jeremiah Tower has been one of the foremost leaders in transforming the American culinary landscape over the past 40 years, starting with the style known as California cuisine. Born in Connecticut in 1942, he was educated in Australia, England, France, and the U.S. He began his culinary career in 1972-78 as co-owner and executive chef of Chez Panisse in Berkeley, CA, and later opened and owned several other celebrated restaurants in San Francisco, Seattle, Hong Kong, and Singapore, including the Stars restaurants which he sold to an Asian group in 1998. Over the years Chef Tower has written or collaborated on several acclaimed books, and he recently donated a wonderful collection of menus and other materials to the Janice Bluestein Longone Culinary Archive at the Univ. of Michigan Libraries. He currently lives in Mexico and Italy. Below, courtesy of Chef Tower, is a version of the second chapter of his forthcoming e-book, Start the Fire: How I Began a Food Revolution in America (Ecco/ HarperCollins, Fall 2016).

Grilling was my first cooking lesson. It's fitting, therefore, that my national fame as a chef started 35 years later standing over an outdoor grill at a press lunch in Newport.¹

The grilling had begun with a lesson when I was five. My teacher was an old Aborigine named Nick, whom I met peeling potatoes out behind the kitchen of an island resort in the Great Barrier Reef.

Perfect Love: Grills, *Galahs*, and *Budgerigars*

Nick had taken me on as a cause. First he taught me how to spike coconuts on a log, whack them with a machete to clean the husks away, open them up, drink the water, eat the flesh. Sucking down the young coconuts, the meat still jellylike and mixed with fresh molasses from sugarcane, seemed to me so sinful, indulgent, and anti-parental that it is to this day one of my favorite things on a hot, steamy beach. Nick also tried to teach me about the birds and the bees, without the benefit of bees, making do with my little lizard (as he called it) instead. I preferred the cooking lessons.

From Nick's dugout canoe I caught a barracuda, which he showed me how to roast over a coconut-shell fire on the beach. It tasted awful, like a meat loaf with fish in it, but I put on a good face. I posed for a photograph eating it, and then fed it to the ravenous cats lurking in the banana trees outside the restaurant. I did the same with my portion of the wild parrots, or *galahs*, which he cooked on spits on the beach. Eating those was to me like cooking the family budgie². All I could see was the bright raspberry pink plumage of the birds in the palms above the beach, and even though there were thousands of them, I couldn't imagine killing one. Let alone eating one. Seeing my disappointment in both these treats, my mentor took me off to the tide pools on the reef, some Olympic-size, some small enough to reach into for oysters, mussels, little crabs for frying, big black shiny sea urchins, and the short spiny purple ones we ate on the spot.



Jeremiah Tower at age 5 in 1948, on an island in the Great Barrier Reef of Australia, trying to eat the barracuda that the old Aborigine Nick had taught him to roast over a coconut-shell fire on the beach.

Photo courtesy of Jeremiah Tower

After that I was allowed to watch a fishing expedition carried out by the adults at dusk. It was in the failing light that the big and best eating fish like barramundi³ came in to shore to get away from the tiger and hammerhead sharks prowling close to the beach for their evening meal. My father, fueled with several pink gins, went chin-deep into the water to provide a strategic “anchor” for one end of the net while the other end was towed around in deeper waters by a little rowboat. The rest of us watched, breathless, from the shore, knowing that a scream from my father meant no dinner, at least not for us.

The ever-darkening waters were screamless. The catch was brought in, gutted, cleaned, and slathered in coconut oil, salt, and chili pepper. The coals of a big bonfire, started to provide light for the cocktail hour, were raked down into a three-inch bed, over which the grill grates were laid. When Nick declared them sizzling hot enough by spitting on them, the fish were set on the grill, big ones first, and then, in stages, all the rest. We ate our fish, crayfish, and grilled oysters while the fire-engine red and Macedonian-gold parrots, pink and gray *galahs*, and thousands of multicolored *budgerigars* swirling overhead, their deafening shrieks descending into murmurs in the inky equatorial darkness. Nick showed us how to squeeze fresh limes on the oysters, sprinkle chili powder mixed with salt on the crayfish, and pour a sauce made from coconut milk, oil, fresh chilies, and lime juice over the cooked fish.

This, I realized, was how life must be.

Cooking these exotic animals from the sea in this tropical setting fixed a love for grilling in my mind forever. I didn’t yet know the word *paradise*, but I knew the concept, and sensed that tropical islands meant abundance, color, and the perfumed life I would always crave. My instincts told me to savor every moment of it and, in the future, never to let those feelings get very far away.

Passion for Fruit

Deprived at an early age of being an orphan, I was forced to live with my parents. A childhood hardly suitable for children. At least to onlookers. To me it was an adventure.

In early 1947, when I was four, my parents moved us from Connecticut to Australia. My father was sent as a managing director of Westrex to make sure their movie houses or cinemas had the right equipment to take their soon-to-be-developed stereophonic sound.

I had never been on a plane, and the leg from San Francisco to Honolulu made me airsick—horrendous enough for me to never want to get on a plane again. Fortunately there was a layover in Waikiki at the very grand Royal Hawaiian Hotel, and in the first hour there I wanted to stay in Hawaii forever. All it took was a few minutes on the balcony looking at the bodies on the beach and the balmy tropical climate bonded me with Hawaii forever. Then I felt increasing misery as I watched the hours go by before we had to once again get in that little DC-3 airplane for Sydney.

The three-day plane trip across the Pacific was so traumatizing that my memory of anything leading up to the coral

landing strip in Fiji is almost entirely erased. But I do recall a few things from those 80 hours in the twin-engine prop DC-3 plane: the smell of the DDT bomb set off in the cabin before we left Honolulu, the dry air, the turbulent plunges, and the French convicts seated behind us on their way to Devil’s Island (only the French would send their convicts first-class) who kept propositioning my 13-year-old sister. I screamed, threw up repeatedly, and pleaded ceaselessly for the plane to be stopped. By the time we skidded to a halt on Fiji’s bleached pink coral atoll, I was frantic to get out. As we arrived at the little corrugated-iron terminal building, I slung my arms around the nearest pole and shrieked—at the top of what was left of my lungs—that I would never leave.

And I stayed wrapped around that pole until approached by a huge man in a *tapa* cloth skirt, black hair teased straight up about a foot and tied with a red ribbon, his torso filling firmly a white military jacket with brass buttons. The fact that he had no shoes on his size-14 feet fascinated me so much that I forgot I was going to live and die on that pole. I loosened my grip with a failing of spirit brought on by the enormous, condensation-covered glass of golden-yellow liquid he was holding. And by his voice, like a vibrating cello as he told me to come and sit in his *tapa*-cloth lap and have some pineapple juice. I am pretty sure that I had never heard of a pineapple, but as he waved the glass under my nose I knew I wanted to.

The smell and sight of that juice is my first and still one of my most vivid culinary memories. The pineapple had undoubtedly been picked only a few hours before in the cool morning and not refrigerated. Just a few chunks of ice in it so the juice was kind to my teeth as it went down. The cool, sweet, refreshing juice shut me up for the first time in two days, so when I asked for a whole pineapple that I saw in the terminal, my mother nodded wearily. The pineapple itself is my second culinary memory: a whole fruit seemingly half the size of me, its top cut off, and so ripe that I could dig into it with my whole hand and eat the entire inside with my fingers. The crew’s irritation that greeted me when I returned covered in pineapple didn’t matter. I had found paradise.

Promises of more juice for the 24-hour trip to Sydney lured me back onto the plane. Their mistake. I drove the stewards mad with demands for more and more, until I was yet again violently ill, this time from all the acid of the canned variety. But I was hooked on tropical fruit, and within hours of arrival, now on firm ground at Sydney’s Hotel Australia, I lunged for the ripe fruit that was sent up by the manager: a huge basket of passion fruit, ripe finger bananas and, of course, more ripe pineapples from tropical Queensland.

From a culinary standpoint, we were lucky that wartime shortages were still in effect and electricity was sporadic. An infrequent refrigerator meant relying on an old stand-up Coca-Cola reach-in cooler on the banana-tree-covered porch. It was powered by ice blocks, which meant that we ate fruit—now also including papayas, mangoes, guava, rambutans, mangosteens, and custard apples—only ice-chilled. By the time the 1930s power stations were updated with American machinery, and our refrigerator was working consistently, we had learned that re-

continued on next page

EARLY PLAYPENS

continued from page 9

frigerated fruit loses the scent of its ripening in the sun, the scent of the heady vapors of tropical jungle plantations. The ice chest remained. Thence came my later insistence, when I had my restaurants, to never refrigerate tomatoes and other fruits.

I loved all the tropical fruit. Its different seasons for the various varieties of mangoes and the excitement when the garnet-red, peppery-aromatic huge papaw arrived. But my favorites were the passion fruits, still warm from the Summer sun, growing along our backyard fence. Listening to the kookaburras overhead in the gum trees, I would bite the top of a hot, ripe fruit and suck out the juices while inhaling the perfume, a taste memory that came to play a constant part in my menus and recipes 25 years later in my Berkeley, San Francisco, and Asian restaurants. Perfectly ripe tropical fruit—the only thing I had in abundance in my early childhood—was a measure of happiness and success.

The Garden as Oasis

I was a stranger to my father until he came back from World War 2 when I was three years old. Our status had not changed much, deteriorating after I bit him in his groin at our first meeting. Things didn't improve much on moving to Australia, but he did provide a grand lifestyle funded by the inheritance from his family's and America's first oil company. Although we lived in the wealthy Vacluse suburb of Sydney, the size of our house was a distinct disadvantage during routine power outages and their resulting lack of heating and hot water.

In cold weather we ended up living in one room with an illegal heater monopolized by the dog; the smell of singeing hair reminds me to this day of deprivation. Home was far preferable to school, however, with its bare stone chapels, rank confessionals, enforced silence, and promises of life perfect only after death. As a Yank, I was mercilessly brutalized by my peers when I wasn't subjected to the wandering hands of priests.

My oasis was our vegetable garden, which my mother opted for after enduring six months of Australian post-war rationed vegetables: cabbage and its entire family, huge potatoes and carrots, the potatoes revoltingly full of deep-set black rotting spots, the carrots more wood core than sweet flesh. The garden was laid out in an old tennis court at the back of the property. The top of a retaining wall, set 10 feet down below the level of the garden, was planted with nasturtiums, and the whole face of the hundred-foot wall was covered in a blanket of these multicolored flowers—this was the start of my love for them. The nasturtiums attracted snails, and since I was paid for my small bucket full of snails, I took on the job of planting and carefully tending these flowers—my first gardening project. As a five-year-old I made sandwiches of nasturtium flowers (an Australian treat) and later, in 1974, put the blossoms in salads at my restaurant, Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California. Ten years later when I started a cooking demo on "Good Morning America", Joan Lunden announced, "I hate flowers [in food]", and went to a commercial.

After my success with the nasturtiums, I chose what I wanted from a seed catalog airmailed from Burpee in the United States and took responsibility for five rows of beans: "runner",



Chef Tower, left, chatting with wine writer Robert Balzer in 1989. Photo by Alan Berliner, *San Francisco Chronicle*.

broad (fava), and lima. With great love and prodigious labor—Australia is the land of extreme climate, droughts alternating with month-long deluges—we produced sweet corn that made the conservative Australians, unaccustomed to eating with their fingers, uncomfortable, but delighted our homesick American guests.

The rest of the Australian diet was lamb chops for breakfast, lamb sandwiches for lunch, and roast lamb for dinner. This was interspersed with a bit of flathead, a fish that was all we could come by when the fishermen were too nervous to venture out through the harbor for ocean fish. Fledgling Communist terrorist groups had taken to blowing up Pan American flying boats anchored in the middle of the route out of the harbor. From our house we had the best view in Sydney of those explosions, but the thrill was significantly lessened by the thought of having to go back to eating lamb or flathead.

After a couple of years, things like fresh shrimp showed up in abundance, and my mother added a jambalaya to her party repertoire. Some of my fondest memories of that huge house are the sideboard groaning with the little there was to cook with, the jambalaya in the center of the display, and the arrival in Sydney of meat other than lamb, even if it was only silverside (top round), corned, and as tough as nails. My treat on my way out of the butcher shop was to pinch some of the wet corning salt surrounding the beef as it sat in a 10-inch-deep marble table by the door, and suck on it until it dissolved.

Chez Prunier

The city's hotels and restaurants featured twee interpretations of English food in a Dame Edna Everage atmosphere.⁴ Whenever it was time for my annual visit to the one renowned French restaurant, Prunier, because it was my mother's birthday, I would be beside myself with excitement. When the tolerant maître d' handed me a huge menu with a silk tassel longer than I was and all the words in French, my mind began to race.

From my many visits over the next three years, I memorized the menu and would insist on ordering for myself—a source of pride to my parents and eye rolling from nearby diners appalled by my high-soprano French pronunciation. I loved Chez Prunier so much that I was an angel of restraint and good manners, but since arrival was an hour before my usual bedtime, the deep gloom then fashionable in deluxe dining rooms made me sleepy. The deal was that I could put my head down on the table and sleep between the main course and dessert—the course that woke me up.

As obnoxious as my mangled French must have seemed, the owner-chef was charming to me and always brought me special things to taste. I was enchanted by his glamor, this man in starched white who had such authority in his domain. And he was a long way from my grizzled, half-naked, Aborigine cooking teacher.

Forty years later, after a lunch promoting California cuisine at the Regent Hotel in Sydney, an old man summoned me to his table. "I'd have recognized you instantly, you're your father's son" he said. Then the owner of Prunier told his guests, "This is the little boy who used to order by himself in horrible French and after the main course put his head on the table to sleep it all off." So many years later, Prunier was still open—and this wonderful old man was still cooking.

On these foundations of my life at six years old, I fixed my attentions on our world of food, wine, and gardening. They were at once a balm as an escape into a private universe of glorious sensation, and my only potential realms of mastery. I knew food plucked from trees, or pulled from the sea and thrown on hot coals. Now in glamorous grand dining rooms of the poshest restaurants and in the kitchens of luxury ocean liners or hotels, these passions—a love of things cooked with bravura in their elemental state, where they came from, how they were grown, and a fascination with "fine dining"—became the foundation and structure of my life. ■

Editor's Notes

1. This refers to the "Innovations in Food" weekend that Ocean Spray's ad agency organized for about 100 food journalists in Spring 1983 at Beechwood, the Astor Mansion in Newport, RI. The full meal—including dessert—that Chef Tower cooked there on outdoor grills triggered a love affair between the American food press and California cuisine.
2. I.e., the *budgerigar*, a common Australian pet parakeet.
3. Asian sea bass.
4. Dame Edna Everage is a famous character created by Australian comedian Barry Humphries and portrayed by him since the 1950s.

THEIR PERSONALITIES LOOM LARGE ON OUR PLATES

Are you hungry for more than we can dish out in these two issues packed with reminiscences? Here, then, is a roundup of some recent books not previously mentioned in *Repast*, written by or about leading contemporary chefs or other food professionals:

- Jacques Pépin, *The Apprentice: My Life in the Kitchen* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003 [hbk.], 2015 [pbk.]).
- Clarissa Dickson Wright, *Spilling the Beans* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2009), an autobiography of this eccentric English personality and lawyer-turned-cook, who passed away in March 2014.
- Anne Willan (with Amy Friedman), *One Soufflé at a Time: A Memoir of Food and France* (St. Martin's Press, 2013). This book, by the famous Englishwoman who founded La Varenne cooking school in Paris in the 1970s, won an IACP award for Best Literary Food Writing.
- Luke Barr, *Provence, 1970: M. F. K. Fisher, Julia Child, James Beard, and the Reinvention of American Taste* (Clarkson Potter, 2013).
- Thomas McNamee, *Alice Waters and Chez Panisse: The Romantic, Impractical, Often Eccentric, Ultimately Brilliant Making of a Food Revolution* (Penguin, 2007).
- Colman Andrews, *Ferran: The Inside Story of El Bulli and the Man Who Reinvented Food* (Gotham Books, 2010), the earliest biography of the "deconstructivist" Catalan chef Ferran Adrià and his "molecular gastronomy".
- Marcus Samuelsson (with Veronica Chambers), *Yes, Chef* (Random House, 2012), a memoir that takes us from his being orphaned in Ethiopia, to his adoption and childhood in Sweden, through the great kitchens of Paris, to his arrival in New York and the opening of his acclaimed Red Rooster restaurant in Harlem.
- Thomas McNamee, *The Man Who Changed the Way We Eat: Craig Claiborne and the American Food Renaissance* (Free Press, 2012).
- Kim Severson, *Spoon Fed: How Eight Cooks Saved My Life* (Riverhead Press, 2010). The author, a graduate of Michigan State Univ., is a food writer at the *New York Times* and previously the *San Francisco Chronicle*.
- And we shouldn't leave out R. W. Apple, Jr., *Far Flung and Well Fed* (St. Martin's Press, 2009), a posthumously published collection of *New York Times* food columns by Ohio native "Johnny" Apple.

FAMILY AND MY SEARCH FOR FOOD HERITAGE

by Dan Vernia

Chef Dan Vernia of Ann Arbor, MI, has worked throughout our state and at other venues in Montreal, Chicago, Phoenix, and New Orleans. He was raised in North Oakland County and studied visual and culinary arts at The Center for Creative Studies and Wayne State University in Detroit. In Michigan he has been chef at the Royal Park Hotel and the Paint Creek Cider Mill Restaurant, both in Rochester; Walloon Lake Inn (near Petoskey); Mind Body & Spirits (Rochester), our state's first certified organic restaurant; the Ravens Club (Ann Arbor); and currently the Juicy Kitchen (Ann Arbor), which features "everyday healthy gourmet food".

My mother and father grew up in Chillicothe, Ohio, one of the oldest towns in America west of the Allegheny Mountains. Over the years, our family made many trips from our home in the northern suburbs of Detroit to visit the grandparents. Much of the conversation during those trips heading south centered on the feasting that awaited, prepared by both of my grandmothers.

Rich in history, Chillicothe was the home of thriving indigenous Hopewell and Shawnee cultures (including Hopewell sacred burial mounds), the seat of the Northwest Territory, the first capital of Ohio, and a stop along the Underground Railroad. Although the history of Chillicothe inspired me, and history and art history became some of my favorite subjects in school, it would not occur to me until years later—and well after I was underway cooking professionally—how my family's food heritage influenced my career path.

Father's Family and The Valley House

Goldie Vernia, my father's mother, ran a very successful restaurant, The Valley House, which at the time had moved to a newer shopping center from its original location in the Warner Hotel, dating back to 1855. Goldie had managed the restaurant in its last days at the Warner after teaching home-economics classes at Mt. Logan Junior High School.

Memories of meals at The Valley House include their Salisbury steak and always a slice of one of the homemade pies. The pies were displayed in a refrigerated case along a corridor between the main dining room in front of the restaurant and the private banquet/meeting space in the back.

Here is Goldie's recipe for the crust, courtesy of my brother, who used it to win a blue ribbon one year at the Tennessee State Fair:

Pie crust

1½ cups shortening
3 cups flour
1 egg
5 Tbsp. cold water
1 Tbsp. vinegar (white or apple cider)
1 tsp. salt.

Cut the shortening into the flour with a pastry blender or fork and knife until it resembles dry oatmeal. Stir the wet ingredients and salt together, then pour into the flour/shortening mixture, and stir gently to incorporate. Separate into two balls, and chill for 30 minutes in the refrigerator. Remove and roll out into a bottom and top crust.

There was also a kitchen service door in the corridor, and my grandmother would occasionally let us enter to say hello to the cooking staff. They were a group of hardworking, mainly middle-aged women, who took the time to show us around. Years later, a similar squad of battle-tested kitchen veterans would whip me into shape at my first cooking job at a fine dining venue that served around 300 for lunch during the week and 500 for dinner on the weekend. That was crazy for sure, as I thought I had been hired as a dish steward—and I was thankful for it, during one of the infamous recessions in Detroit. I believe at the time I was living in a barn for the Summer with some artist and musician friends.

Grandmother Goldie accompanied us on one trip to the East Coast, where in Washington we enjoyed lunch at the Senate restaurant in the Capitol that included their famous bean soup, still offered every day. This is the recipe posted on the U.S. Senate's website:

Senate Restaurant Bean Soup Recipe

2 pounds dried navy beans
4 quarts hot water
1½ pounds smoked ham hocks
1 onion, chopped
2 tablespoons butter
salt and pepper to taste.

Wash the navy beans and run hot water through them until they are slightly whitened. Place beans into pot with hot water. Add ham hocks and simmer approximately three hours in a covered pot, stirring occasionally. Remove ham hocks and set aside to cool. Dice meat and return to soup. Lightly brown the onion in butter. Add to soup. Before serving, bring to a boil and season with salt and pepper. Serves 8.

Mother's Family and Things Rural

The home of my mother's parents, Dorothy and Leonard Pickerell, was a special place as well. Set atop Carlisle Hill, the house resembled a Southern plantation, with a long U-

shaped driveway bordering the large front yard. I remember throwing footballs with my brother and cousins in our T-shirts one Christmas day as our grandmother put the finishing touches on one of her many elaborate holiday buffets. Some of my favorite dishes include cucumbers and onions marinated in cider vinegar and sugar, and smokehouse spaghetti with a generous amount of bacon.

Another great memory of tasting pork occurred on a trip from southern Ohio to my mother's birthplace in Seymour, Indiana. We visited my Great-Great Aunt and Uncle, Emma and John, at their farm outside of town and were served breakfast that included sausage made from hogs they had raised. This was my first "Farm to Table" experience— with the farm right outside the back door.

My grandfather Leonard was a successful businessman who owned a Buick-Oldsmobile dealership and frequently made trips up to Taylor, Michigan, to make deals at the auto auctions. He would often visit us on these trips, usually after having lunch at the London Chop House in Detroit. I believe Chef Jimmy Schmidt was at the London Chop House when I was given my first Head Chef position. It was at the Paint Creek Cider Mill Restaurant in Rochester, MI, located in a historic cider mill. This followed traveling and cooking stints in Phoenix, Montreal, and New Orleans.

At this time, a number of cooks were featuring a Midwest sensibility in their menus, including Chefs Schmidt,

Brian Polcyn (then at The Lark in West Bloomfield, Michigan), and Pete Peterson (then at the Rowe Inn in Ellsworth, in the northern Lower Peninsula, shortly before he opened Tapawingo). Culinary heritage and history were becoming aligned, and I was in a perfect place to be inspired and influenced by these ideas. In fact, the mill property where I cooked had first been settled when Michigan was part of the Northwest Territory. After the Cider Mill Restaurant, I accepted a position at the Walloon Lake Inn, owned by Chef David Beier and located 10 miles south of Petoskey, Michigan, in a building dating back to the 1880s.

Recovering a Midwest Culinary Heritage

Shortly after moving back to the Detroit area from northern Michigan, I began doing business with The Chef's Garden in Huron, Ohio. I featured their products at a number of different venues and volunteered at fundraising events for their nonprofit Farm to School program, "Veggie U". Trips to the farm also provided the opportunity to do research in the library at The Culinary Vegetable, the facility that is home to the nonprofit and to a kitchen used by its chef-clients for research and development.

I was influenced by that library because of its amazing collection of cookbooks and its many vintage agricultural manuals, including the annual reports of the USDA. These

continued on next page



The Royal Park Hotel's Banquet Chef Dan Vernia (center) and Executive Chef Colin Brown (just right of him) were invited to prepare Michigan-inspired cuisine for a Jan. 2011 dinner at the James Beard House in Greenwich Village, Manhattan, held in conjunction with the annual conference of the Carino Hotels and Resorts Worldwide.

Photo:
EventTrender.com

DAN VERNIA

continued from page 13

two quotes from the Agricultural Secretary, published in the very first report from 1861, the year the agency was founded, speak to the agricultural plenty of the U.S. while also predicting that this plenty would itself encourage a mistreatment of the land:

The United States are, and must always remain, an agricultural Nation. For this the soil, the climate, the institutions of the Country and the age of the world have particularly fitted them, and it is the duty of the Government to take all possible measures to secure to the agriculturists of America the fullest benefits of its ample resources.

It is the great amount of land under cultivation, the ease of which it is worked and the sparse population, which attends such crops and enables such a great surplus to be expanded. But this condition of things cannot last. The most fertile soil will in time become exhausted by constant cropping and both the yield and quality of products will deteriorate. Such are the results of the American method of cultivation, a method growing out of having a continent to cultivate and exhaust of its virgin fertility.

As the movement of regional growers and producers increased, I gained more sources for menu ingredients and more contacts with local food system and sustainable-ag activists. In addition, I was introduced to the wealth of information at the University of Michigan's Clements Library, especially the Longone Culinary Archive.

One of my favorite discoveries at the Clements is the story and documentation of the Thanksgiving meal sent to the Union Army in 1864, which was initiated and coordinated by The Union Club in New York City. I stumbled upon this quite by chance while looking for some historical information in anticipation of a trip to Manhattan to cook at the James Beard House with Colin Brown, Executive Chef of the Royal Park Hotel in my hometown of Rochester, Michigan.

Shortly after our trip to Manhattan, in early 2011 I moved to the Ann Arbor area to open The Ravens Club, where we were able to feature menu items and special events inspired by my research. For example, we offered a special holiday plate from Thanksgiving to Christmas that was based on reports of what Union soldiers received in November of 1864. At another point we had a special dinner featuring recipes from the *Opera* by Bartolomeo Scappi, an Italian chef who cooked for cardinals and popes and participated in the culinary activities during the papal conclaves of the mid-16th Century.

It's quite a path that I've been on in the last 35 years or so, working in many different kitchens and with some amazing chefs, and having the privilege to celebrate our local heritage through cooking. I hope I have embraced it all with the same enthusiasm as I did as a youngster digging into a plate of smokehouse spaghetti and a slice or two of homemade pie. For these were prepared by the chefs who, together with the history of our region, turned out to be my original inspiration. ■



In June 2012, chef Dan Vernia and baker Sarah Ladd, both then employed at The Ravens Club, prepared food together in one of their volunteer stints at the Selma Café, a weekly Ann Arbor benefit breakfast for local food growers.

Photo:
SelmaCafe.org

MORSELS & TIDBITS

Congratulations to **Al Ameer restaurant** in Dearborn, MI, one of five establishments in the U.S. selected to receive a 2016 James Beard Foundation America's Classic Award. These awards have been given since 1998 to recognize "beloved regional restaurants" that "serve quality food that reflects the character of their communities." Al



Ameer, established in 1989 by **Khalil Ammar** (left) and **Zaki Hashem** (right), is the first Michigan restaurant to receive this honor. The award citation calls it "a bedrock institution in Dearborn, Michigan, and one of the nation's most welcoming introductions to the pleasures of Lebanese cuisine." It goes on to note, "The owners also run a *halal* butcher nearby. Accordingly, Al Ameer is the place to savor *sujuk* sausage, vivid with paprika and cumin, or a feast of tender shredded lamb rich with almonds, yogurt, and rice." The awards are to be given on May 2 at the Lyric Opera of Chicago.

Deborah L. Krohn gave the concluding March 6 lecture in "The Edible Monument: The Art of Food for Festivals", a Fall and Winter series of public programs organized at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles with a focus on the medieval and early modern periods in Europe. An accompanying book with the same title was published by the Getty and edited by its chief curator, **Marcia Reed**. Krohn, an associate professor at the Bard Graduate Center where she teaches Italian Renaissance decorative arts and material culture, spoke on the subject of her new book, *Food and Knowledge in Renaissance Italy: Bartolomeo Scappi's Paper Kitchen* (Routledge, 2015). It documents that Scappi, the most famous chef of the Italian Renaissance and author of the first illustrated cookbook in Europe, the *Opera* (Venice, 1570), was at the vanguard of a new way of looking at the kitchen as a workshop or laboratory. We should also mention a book intended as an introduction to the subject, *Cooking and Eating in Renaissance Italy: From Kitchen to Table* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), by **Katherine A. McIver**, a professor emerita of art history at the Univ. of Alabama at Birmingham. Her work treats the middle as well as the upper classes, including insights gleaned from letters and household inventories.

In the United Kingdom, there's been a recent trend toward Scandinavian-themed restaurants, cafés, and bars. If the phenomenon takes root stateside, then **Darra Goldstein's** new book will have a big role to play in helping to interpret this cuisine for an American audience. Her *Fire and Ice: Classic Nordic Cooking* (Ten Speed Press, 2015) is replete with

descriptions and photos of the natural and cultural backdrops in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland. Over 100 recipes are featured, for dishes such as oven rye porridge, braided cardamom bread, Västerbotten cheese pie, chanterelle soup, meatball and celery-root stew, roast duck with apples and prunes, and honey- and beer-braised short ribs with root vegetables. Goldstein is a professor of Russian at Williams College and was founding editor of the journal *Gastronomica*.

Ginkgo Press, Inc., led by **Joan B. Peterson** of the Culinary Historians of Wisconsin (CHoW) and publishers of the award-winning EAT SMART culinary travel guidebooks, offers culinary tours this year to Indonesia (Aug. 3-14) and Turkey (Sep. 15-25). For more info, visit <http://www.eatsmartguides.com/tours.html>.

We make note of two exhibits:

- CHAA member **Margaret Carney**, director of the Dinnerware Museum, announces that "Cake" will run Apr. 9 - Sep. 4, 2016, at The Museum on Main Street (500 N. Main St., Ann Arbor). The exhibit features many of the pieces entered in the museum's recent second annual juried artwork competition, which called for functional pedestal cake stands as well as sculptural works of cake that could be displayed on such stands. For more information, visit the museum website, <http://www.dinnerwaremuseum.org/cake.html>. On May 15, Dr. Carney gives a related talk (see next page).
- "Food Will Win the War" runs through Fall 2016 at the Canada Agriculture and Food Museum in Ottawa, ON. This display explores the story of food on the Canadian home front during 1939-45. Focusing on shopping, eating, conserving, and volunteering, it shows how Canadians fought a "war for food" to support Canada's overseas war efforts. The exhibit was guest curated by **Ian Mosby**, author of *Food Will Win the War: The Politics, Culture, and Science of Food on Canada's Home Front* (Univ. of British Columbia Press, 2014). Mosby is an historian of food, health, and colonialism and currently a postdoctoral fellow at McMaster Univ. in Hamilton, ON.

We also note four conferences in the British Isles this Spring and Summer:

- Apr. 23, 2016: Leeds Symposium on Food History and Traditions, "Eating on the Move" (Friends' Meeting House, Friargate, York, UK)
- May 31 - Jun. 1, 2016: Second biennial Dublin Gastronomy Symposium, "Food and Revolution" (School of Culinary Arts & Food Technology, Dublin Inst. of Technology)
- Jul. 4-7, 2016: 23rd International Medieval Congress, "Food, Feast and Famine" (Univ. of Leeds, UK)
- Jul. 8-10, 2016: Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, "Offal: Rejected and Reclaimed Foods" (St. Catherine's College, Oxford Univ., UK). ■

CHAA CALENDAR

(Unless otherwise noted, programs are scheduled for 3:00 – 5:00 p.m. and are held at Ann Arbor Senior Center, 1320 Baldwin Ave.)

Sunday, April 17, 2016

T.R. Durham (Durham's Tracklements),
"How We Do What We Do
at the Tracklements Smokery"

Sunday, May 15, 2016

Ann Arbor District Library, Malletts Creek Branch
(3090 E. Eisenhower Pkwy., Ann Arbor),
Dr. Margaret Carney, director and
curator of the Dinnerware Museum,
"Cake: The Intersection of All Things 'Cake'
and the Art World"

Sunday, July 17, 2016

4-7 p.m., Ladies' Literary Club of Ypsilanti
(218 N. Washington St., Ypsilanti),
Members-only participatory theme meal,
"Honoring Marcella Hazan and Paula Wolfert,
Queens of Mediterranean Cuisine".

On the Back Burner: We welcome ideas and submissions
from all readers of *Repast*, including for the following planned
future theme-issues. Suggestions for future themes are also
welcome.

- Summer 2016: Reminiscences of Food Professionals, Part 2
- Fall 2016: The Food Culture of Portugal.

REPAST
1044 GREENHILLS DRIVE
ANN ARBOR, MI 48105-2722



Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

Volume XXXII Number 2, Spring 2016

First Class