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Repast

Quarterly Publication of the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor



“Food that really schmecks”

Cookbook writer Edna Staebler (1906–2006) preserved the food traditions of rural women in Canada. These two dishes are from the German Mennonite heritage in southwestern Ontario: pork sausages in beer, served over mashed potatoes and carrots with a side of schnippled bean salad, and ultra-moist apple-schnitz kuchen. The recipes, and the full story, can be found on pages 3-8.

Photos are from
the Culinary Historians of Canada,
Digestible Bits and Bites, Nov. 2019.



Call for New CHAA Officers

Volunteers are needed to fill two important vacancies with the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor: Program Chair and Treasurer. If you might be interested or want to learn more about either of these opportunities, please contact CHAA President Mariam Breed at mariamvandeventer@icloud.com.

The Program Chair, in consultation with other members, arranges a variety of interesting culinary history talks and programs, and works with the public library and our website to schedule and publicize the talks. We already have several upcoming talks scheduled, so there will be time for the new Chair to become acquainted with the work.

The role of Treasurer calls for a patient and meticulous person because it entails collecting dues, maintaining the membership spreadsheet, overseeing payments for different kinds of expenses, and handling our bank account and other financial matters. Outgoing Treasurer Judy Steeh is available through this Fall and, if necessary, remotely into the new year, so there will be time for the new Treasurer to become acquainted with the work. ■

Repast

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RECIPES FOR RESPECT *cont'd from page 9*



Washington University in St. Louis

Professor Rafia Zafar

Food and cooking in the long African American experience not only sustained families and communities but were also routes to entrepreneurial success, giving the lie to notions of Black inferiority that were promoted by racist laws, attitudes, and emblems such as “Aunt Jemima”, recently withdrawn by Quaker Oats. Zafar’s work documents that African American cookery was far from simply a cookery of poverty, servitude, and disenfranchisement.

Among the chapter topics here, one of my favorites is that of Black men’s hospitality books. In the first half of the 19th Century, Robert Roberts in Boston and Tunis Campbell in New York wrote practical guides for men in the serving professions: cooks, dining waiters, butlers, valets, and hoteliers. Useful, yes, but equally their writing encouraged men of color to enter and flourish in arenas thought to be inherently subservient work, but which in fact offered career resources and a path to respectability.

There are hardly any more complex American stories than the three people discussed in Chapter 2, “Born a Slave, Died a Chef: Slave Narratives and the Beginnings of Culinary Memoir”. I have cooked from each of the cookbooks by Malinda Russell (Paw Paw, MI, 1866), Abby Fisher (San Francisco, 1881), and Rufus Estes (Chicago, 1911). To share the biographies of these fine cooks along with one of their sauces or main dishes with my dinner guests is a great privilege. (Incidentally, I would bet that Estes was a reader of Tunis Campbell’s hotel guide.)

As much as I have thought about, spoken of, and cooked from *The Taste of Country Cooking* (1976) by the Virginia-raised New York chef Edna Lewis, I would never have imagined I’d be reading an in-depth comparative essay on it, her, and the cookbook writer Alice B. Toklas. To be truthful, Zafar’s thesis concerning “elegy or sankofa” still has me puzzled, but I’m convinced that this is due to my lack, not to Zafar’s intricate prose. It’s going to take me a few more careful reads to ‘get it’, but that is what the African American culinary experience is like; read the ingredients carefully as you will always get more than you bargained for.

REMEMBERING EDNA STAEBLER, A CANADIAN CULINARY ICON

by Rose Murray

Rose Murray has been a household name in Canadian cookbook publishing and women's magazines for four decades. She is a Lifetime Member of the Culinary Historians of Canada and was inducted into the Taste Canada Hall of Fame in 2015. Rose grew up on a farm near Collingwood, Ontario, which is where she first acquired her keen awareness of the rural and agricultural traditions of food. She went on to write 14 cookbooks, starting with Canadian Christmas Cooking (1979). Hungry for Comfort, which unearthed the recipes of a past generation and gently reminded baby boomers of tastes and smells from their childhoods, was judged the best English cookbook at the Cuisine Canada/ University of Guelph National Culinary Book Awards in 2004. In A Taste of Canada (2008), she traveled from coast to coast to point out the ingredients and recipes from each region of the country. Ms. Murray co-authored Canada's Favourite Recipes (2012) with fellow CH-Canada member Elizabeth Baird. She is also a guest lecturer and demonstrator at schools, fairs, and other events across Canada.



John Cline via Wikimedia

Canadian writer and philanthropist Edna Staebler

Jan. 15, 1906 – Sep. 12, 2006

tion in Ingersoll, ON (where she taught geography, Latin, French, English literature, spelling, composition, and all of the physical education for the girls), lasted only a year after the principal saw her turning a back somersault on the front lawn. The school board fired her, saying she was too close to the age of her pupils.

When she married in 1933, she did what wives were expected to do— stay home and learn to cook and sew, and even to hook rugs and make furniture— but instead of playing bridge, she read instead. And she faithfully kept a journal, acted in Little Theatre plays, and wrote a couple of one-act plays that won contests, but still no book.

In 1945, on a trip to Nova Scotia's Cape Breton, she suddenly realized that her first book would indeed be about a bleak fishing village there, Neil's Harbour. When she returned home with this idea there was no support from her family, nor were there any formal writing courses in those days. It was through a chance meeting and subsequent correspondence with Dr. John Robins, an English professor at the Univ. of Toronto, that Edna gained the encouragement and help to follow through with her plan to write a book.

In the Spring of 1948, Edna put on her "new gold lace straw hat with the flowers all around the front and her new beige suit with its flared skirt and fitted jacket" and personally delivered an unsolicited article based on her Cape Breton trip to *Maclean's Magazine*. The story was not only published but was the most-read article in the issue. It was the first in a long series of articles that Edna wrote for various magazines including *Maclean's*, *Chatelaine*, *Saturday Night*, and the *Toronto Star Weekly*.

continued on next page

Edna Staebler loved a party. Over our many years of close friendship, she was the hit of countless parties at our house. At her 100th birthday party given by Ontario's Wilfrid Laurier University in 2005, however, she was amazed that there were more than 500 guests all eager to help celebrate the amazing milestone. With her great interest in and affection for people, no one else was surprised to see so many turned out to honor this great lady. She had the most interesting life, full of fascinating stories and interwoven with people from all walks of life and inclinations.

Edna grew up wanting to write— some day. Born in Berlin, Ontario, she lived just two blocks from the Berlin Public Library and devoured the books that she found there. Due to anti-German sentiment during World War 1, Berlin was renamed Kitchener in 1916. (Later, Edna would be a long-standing member and chairwoman of that same library's board, and as such she made significant improvements in the library itself.)

She graduated from the University of Toronto in 1929 with a Bachelor of Arts degree, of which she was very proud. When she went to see the president of Simpson's Department Stores to offer her services as manager of a new store in Kitchener, he told her she might consider starting as a clerk first. The clerks' jobs she was able to obtain did not last long when her bosses told her she had too much imagination for such jobs! Her teaching posi-



On October 19, 2019, the Culinary Historians of Canada organized “Schmecks Appeal, the Culinary Legacy of Edna Staebler”, a day of activities to learn about and celebrate Mennonite food heritage in the Kitchener-Waterloo region of southwestern Ontario. In the photo at left, taken at Relish Cooking Studio in Kitchener, Rose Murray (left) shares information and personal stories about Staebler while Donna-Marie Pye, co-owner of the studio, prepares a delicious lunch using Staebler’s recipes and local ingredients. A few of the dishes are shown on the front page of this issue, and their recipes on page 8. Photo from CH-Canada’s *Digestible Bits and Bites*, Nov. 2019.

EDNA STAEBLER *continued from page 3*

That first story eventually grew into the first of 20 books that Staebler would write, *Cape Breton Harbour*, described by writer Harold Horwood as one of the best works of travel literature published in Canada. It is in this book that an amiable fisherman in Neil’s Harbour sums up Edna’s appeal to everyone she meets: “seems just loike (sic) you be one of us”.

Each magazine story took Edna directly into the world she was writing about, and it was her affinity with people that won her their confidence. As a journalist, her research in each case was unsurpassed. Her keen observation, living with the Hutterites of Alberta, the Iroquois Indians of Ontario’s Six Nations Reserve, miners in Northern Ontario, an Italian family in Toronto and of course, her beloved Old Order Mennonites in the Waterloo region, made her portrayals honest and sensitive. Edna had the ability to see inside people, gather the ingredients of their lifestyle, and articulate it in her writing so that we could all understand it. She taught Canadians about themselves.

Her *Maclean’s* story about the Old Order Mennonites in the Kitchener area in 1950 won the Canadian Women’s Press Club award. This was the first of many awards that Staebler won over the years, including Kitchener-Waterloo Woman of the Year in 1980, “Lifetime Achievement” by the Waterloo Regional Arts Council, Honourary Doctor of Letters Degree from Wilfrid Laurier University in 1984, a Canadian National Magazine Award in 1987, Kitchener-Waterloo Arts Award and Province of Ontario Senior Achievement Award in 1989, the Toronto Culinary Guild’s Silver Ladle Award in 1991, and membership in the Order of Canada in 1996. She was the first recipient of Cuisine Canada’s lifetime achievement award in 1996, an award that came to be known as the “Edna”.

It was the Mennonite story that eventually led Edna to writing her immensely successful cookbook, *Food that Really Schmecks: Mennonite Country Cooking*, which in 1968 was published in Toronto by McGraw-Hill and in Chicago by Follett (see excerpts and recipes on pages 5-8). It was followed by 14 more Schmecks books, with aggregate sales of over half a million copies.

Edna’s insightful look into the lives of her Mennonite friends and others in these books and her creative writing style have made the cookbooks classics, not just for their food but for the people throughout their pages. They are well-written accounts of lifestyles and descriptions of kitchens “filled with the homely fragrance of wonderful things to eat”. Full of colorful anecdotes and flavorful dialect, they offer realistic stories of the lives of these people.

People were very important to Edna, and her generosity has helped so many. To give new writers the support that she herself had sought when starting out, Edna set up an annual national award for a book of creative non-fiction administered by Wilfrid Laurier University. She donated to WLU a valuable painting done by Linda Johns, an early winner of Edna’s prize for her book *Living a Robin’s Life*. As well, Edna helped establish *The New Quarterly* journal, endowed the writer-in-residence program at the Kitchener Public Library, subsidized the fellowship for local history research founded by the Friends of the Schneider Haus, and set up a number of student prizes at Wilfrid Laurier University, including the Gerald A. Noonan Memorial Bursary in Canadian Literature to honor her dear friend of 30 years, and the George Blackburn Scholarship in Canadian History named for one of her award winners.

These days, many people retire in their early 60s, the age at which Edna Staebler had her first book published. Forty years later, at age 100, she was still working... reading all the submissions for the creative non-fiction prize, endowing funds to worthy people, story-telling and collecting friends. She may have stopped her travels around the world, but the world was still making its way to her door. Fellow authors (including such familiar names as Pierre Berton, Margaret Laurence, W. O. Mitchell, Peter Gzowski, Stuart McLean), international visitors, television crews, newspaper people, photographers, neighbours, young and old alike— everyone who met Edna was devoted not only to her version of sour-cream salads and Dutch apple pie found in the Schmecks books, but to the lady herself. We fans in the Canadian food community are very proud that she “be one of us”.

THOSE MOUTH-WATERING MENNONITE MEALS

What follows is an excerpt from "Those Mouth-Watering Mennonite Meals", the first chapter of Edna Staebler's first book, Food that Really Schmecks: Mennonite Country Cooking as Prepared by My Mennonite Friend, Bevy Martin, My Mother and Other Fine Cooks (Chicago: Follett Publishing Co., 1968). Edna's parents, John and Louise (née Sattler) Cress, both had Mennonite ancestry, although they were not practicing Mennonites. The Old Order Mennonites (Fuhremennischt), a minority within the Canadian Mennonite population, are descended from Swiss German and south German settlers in Pennsylvania; their forebears moved on from there to Ontario in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Over 10,000 of them currently live in Ontario, most of them fluent in the Pennsylvania German language (Pennsilfaanisch-Deutsch) as well as in English. They dress plainly and shun certain technologies, such as motorized vehicles and television. Globally, the Mennonites, German Baptists, Amish, and Hutterites are the largest groups within the Anabaptist Christian movement that embraces about 4 million adherents.

— RKS

One of the joys of my life is to visit my Old Order Mennonite friends, the Martins, in their sprawling fieldstone farmhouse near the Conestoga River in Waterloo County. Their large old-fashioned kitchen, warmed by a big black cookstove, always has a homely fragrance of wonderful things to eat. Sometimes there is an apple smell, sometimes an aroma of rivel soup, roasting meat, baking cinnamon buns or spicy botzelbaum pie.

Bevy, the plump little lady of the house, is always busy schnitzing (cutting up apples for drying), canning or cooking. With the wings of her soft brown hair smoothly parted under her organdie prayer cap she wears a plain navy-blue dress with a skirt almost down to her ankles. She greets me with a smile and a handshake: "Of course you'll stay for supper", she says as she hangs up my coat on a nail. "You know we feel real bad if you come for a visit and don't make out a meal."

I readily accept, always and often.

The food Bevy cooks has such mouth-watering savor that no one can resist it. Like all Mennonite cooking it is plain but divinely flavored and different from any other. You don't have to belong to the Mennonite faith to enjoy it: everyone who has grown up in Waterloo County is devoted to sour-cream salads and the richness of Dutch apple pie. Visitors and newcomers beg for recipes that have passed from generation to generation of

EDNA STAEBLER Food that Really Schmecks MENNONITE COUNTRY COOKING



Mennonite housewives without being printed in a cookbook. Everyone who tastes schnitz und knepp, crusty golden pahnhaas and luscious shoo-fly pie wants to know how to prepare them.

Simplicity, economy and experience are the keynotes of Mennonite cooking. Recipes are invented to make use of everything that is grown on Waterloo County farms. Fruits are canned and pickled and made into juicy pies. Beef and ham are cured with maple smoke, pork scraps become well-seasoned sausages. Sour milk is made into cheeses, sour cream is used in fat cakes and salads. Stale bread is crumbled and browned with butter to give zest to vegetables, noodles and dumplings. Nothing is ever wasted and every meal is a feast.

"Today it gives endive salad [see recipe on page 7] and fetschpatze (fat sparrows [the colorful term for deep-fried dough balls])", Bevy tells me as she puts on a clean print apron, tying it first in front to be sure the bow is even, then pulling it round and patting it over her stomach. I sit in the rocker by the kitchen window while she bustles between the sink, the stove and the big square table covered with bright-colored oilcloth. "You don't mind if I keep on working while we visit", she says. "The curds are getting that smell I don't like round the house and I have to quick make my kochkase (cook cheese)."

continued on next page

MENNONITE MEALS *continued from page 5*

She melts butter in a granite-ware kettle and into it pours sour-milk curds which have been scalded, crumbled and ripened for three or four days. She stirs the mass till it melts to the color of honey, adds cream and keeps stirring till it comes to a boil that goes “poof!” then pours it into a crock and sets it away in the pantry. “Do you want to lick the dish?” She gives me a spoon and the kettle to scrape. “Some like it better with caraway seed in but we rather have it chust plain.” Sampling its mild mellow goodness, I agree that it couldn’t be better.

As she works at the kitchen sink Bevvv glances through the window above it. “I look up the lane every once in a while to see if there’s a horse and rig coming for supper”, she says. “We love to have company drop in.”

“Does it happen often?”

“Not so much during the week but every Sunday when we have service in the church nearest us people come here for dinner. Sometimes there’s not so many, maybe chust a family or two, but sometimes we might have thirty-five. We never know, they chust come.”

“Without being specially invited?”

“Ach, our people are always welcome. They know we have plenty to eat and it don’t take long to get ready when everyone helps. Come once and I’ll show you.”

In a dark pantry off the kitchen she shows me crocks of cheese, elderberries, lotvarrick (apple butter), bags full of schnitz (dried apple segments), dried corn and beans, pails of maple syrup and sacks of sugar and flour.

The cellar looks like a store. A room twelve feet square has shelves all around it from the floor to the ceiling filled with quart and half-gallon jars of fruit, vegetables, jam and pickled things. On a larder that hangs from the ceiling in the center of the room are pies and buns and cake. On the floor there are crocks of head cheese, jars of canned beef and chicken, and pork sausage sealed in with lard.

In another room smoked meats and sausages hang from the beams above us. There are great bins of potatoes and turnips. Other vegetables are stored in boxes of leaves and there are barrels full of apples.

“This is our work for the Summer and Fall”, Bevvv says. “We like preserving and it makes us feel good when we have it away in the cellar.” When Bevvv’s children come from school and their chores in the barn are all done, Amsey, aged ten, the very shy youngest in black stove-pipe pants and a collarless jacket, shines up a basket of apples, then happily makes a bowlful of popcorn because there is company to treat.

Bevvv’s merry pretty daughter Lyddy Ann, who is 15 and dressed in the same style as her mother— except that she doesn’t wear a cap— sets the kitchen table with ironstone china and the staples that are on it for breakfast, dinner and supper. There is bread, butter and jam: “We were taught we’d be sick if we didn’t

eat jam-bread at the front part of every meal”, Bevvv says. There are pickles and dishes of sours: “We may never leave anything on our plates and sometimes a little relish on a piece of schpeck (fat meat) helps to make it swallow”, Lyddy says. For every meal there are potatoes and coffee.

At least twice a day there’s a plateful of Summer sausage. For breakfast there is, in addition, coffee cake, porridge or cornmeal mush and a bowlful of schnitz and gwetcha (dried apples and prunes cooked together). For dinner and supper there is always a bowl of fruit, a plateful of cookies or cake, pudding and pie— besides soup and the main course. When I tease Bevvv about having three desserts she says, “Canned peaches are not dessert, they are chust fruit. Pudding is not dessert neither, it is only for filling the corners, and cookies and pie are chust natural for anybody to have.”

On the stove there’s a kettle of simmering beef broth; a pot of potatoes is boiling, ham is frying in an iron pan, a sauce for the salad is thickening; and in a pan of hot lard the fetschpatze are becoming a tender golden brown.

Bevvv’s great handsome husband, David, wearing a plaid shirt and overalls, and her 20-year-old Salome, dressed like Lyddy Ann, come in from their work in the barn. They greet me with hearty handshakes, then wash and “comb themselves” at the sink.

At the stove there’s a clatter of action. Bevvv puts the baked fetschpatze into the warming closet. Lyddy mixes the salad. Salome mashes the potatoes and spoons them into a bowl. Bevvv puts the meat on a platter.

We sit around the bountiful table and bow our heads in a long silent prayer.

Everyone reaches for a piece of bread. David helps himself to the meat, potatoes, vegetable and salad, then passes them on to me. I fill up my plate and pass the dishes to Amsey. As we eat the curly, crisp endive salad Bevvv tells me exactly how she has made its thick, warm sour-cream sauce.

“I never seen you measure exact that way yet”, Lyddy Ann says to her mother.

“Ach, I made it so often already I chust put in what I think. Like for most things, I tell by the feel or the taste. Since I was a little girl I helped my mam and I learned from her chust like my girls learn from me. That’s why it’s hard to give the amounts of a recipe to a stranger.”

Salome says, “She tells us, ‘Put in a little handful of this, or a big handful of that, a pinch of one thing, or half-an-egg-shell of something else, or a lump the size of a butternut’. It’s always ‘flour to stiffen or enough to make a thin batter’. And for soup and the like of that it’s ‘put in milk or water up to the second scratch in the kettle’.”

Bevvv laughs, “Ach, well, so it must be. How much you make depends on how many people you cook for. We don’t like to run short on anything but we don’t like to waste nothing neither.”

“She usually guesses chust right”, Amsey says, “except when it’s brown sugar sauce for the apple dumplings and I could eat extra.”

Bevvy cooks all her meats and vegetables without consulting a guide and their flavor is magnificent. She makes potpie of pigeons and rabbits and veal. She roasts beef, pork and lamb. Her gravies are brown and shiny. She fries chickens in butter and, dipped in egg and bread crumbs, the little fresh fish that Amsey catches in the river. She cooks sauerkraut with succulent spareribs. In an iron pot she makes stew and pot roasts browned with onions and bay leaves. Sometimes she has duck or roast goose bursting with savory dressing.

“But we don’t always have fresh meat in the country”, Bevvy says. “Only right after we butcher. We have to cure it to keep it. Some we make into sausage, some we pack solid in jars and steam it; we smoke beef and ham. What we like best is the Summer sausage: it is beef and pork ground real fine with seasoning and saltpeter, then stuffed tight in cotton bags the size of a lady’s stocking and smoked for a week with maple smoke.”

“We eat that every day; we never get sick of it”, David says.

“We couldn’t live without Summer sausage”, little Amsey says as he slaps a slice on a piece of bread and butter.

“Ach, we could live without only we rather wouldn’t”, Bevvy says. “We got all other kinds yet, like schwadamahga sausage and liverwurst and head cheese: they’re mostly made from the pork scraps but they go good with fried potatoes and pickles, or beet and red-cabbage salad.”

Salome says, “I rather have schnitz und knepp” (dried apples boiled with a ham bone and dumplings).

“Me too” says Lyddy Ann.

“You should see these women”, David says to me, “how they sit sometimes all day schnitzing apples and drying them for the Winter. Or making lotvarrick from cider and apples and cinnamon boiled and stirred half a day till it is brown and thick enough to spread with schmierkase [a slightly sour cheese made from buttermilk] on bread.” He licks his lips and shakes his head, “Oh my, but that is good.”

“She’ll think we’re a pig the way we make so much of our food”, Salome says.

Bevvy smiles at me calmly, “She knows we work hard and we need it and never throw nothing away.”

Not even a piece of bread. Before it’s too stale Bevvy uses it for pudding or stuffing in tenderloin, spareribs or fowl. She breaks pieces of bread into milk soups. When it is hard as a cracker she grinds it and keeps it in jars to mix with cheese on a casserole or to brown with butter and sprinkle over cooked vegetables, brown buttered dumplings with onions, and anything made with a cream sauce.

“One of our strictest rules is never to waste a thing”, Bevvy says. “When the Mennonites were over in Switzerland yet, they

got chased around by those that didn’t like their peace-loving religion and I guess they had to eat whatever they could get. Then in 1683 they started coming to Pennsylvawnie and gradually had things a little easier. But those that came up here to Ontario after the American Revolution had it hard again. Even if they had money they couldn’t buy anything yet because there was nothing here but bush till they cleared the land and started to grow things.

“It’s only lately since I grew up that we bought food in the stores, except sugar and spices, molasses and salt. We only used what we grew in our own fields and garden and made recipes up to suit.”

From a drawer in the cupboard Bevvy brings me her most treasured possession: a little handwritten black notebook in which she has copied recipes, swapped and inherited. It is well worn and some of its pages are spattered with lard. At the top of each page is written the name of the recipe’s donor. There is Aunt Magdaline’s Hurry Cake, Grossmommy Martin’s Kuddelfleck and Cantaloupe Pickle, Melinda Gingerich’s Groundcherry Preserve. “When I see those names”, Bevvy says, “I know chust how it tasted because most of recipes I got when I ate at their places.”

“This is Cousin Katie’s recipe for fetschpatze; we eat them hot and dunked in maple syrup”, Bevvy says as the deep-fried golden balls are passed around the table. And we all eat so many that David says, “It wonders me that we’ll have room after this for the pie. But we will.” ■

From Edna Staebler, *Food that Really Schmecks* (Chicago: Follett Publishing Co., 1968), pp. 92-93.

Endive Salad

Curly, crisp, bleached yellow endive with a warm sour-cream dressing and bacon is a wonderful change from the eternal tossed lettuce salad, served with a dinner or buffet supper.

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| 1 (medium-size) head of endive (since heads vary in size you’ll have to figure out how much you need and increase or decrease the amount of dressing— but don’t skimp it) | |
| 3 or 4 slices of bacon | 1 cup sour cream |
| 2 teaspoons sugar | Salt and pepper |
| 2 teaspoons flour | 2 hard-boiled eggs |
| 2 teaspoons vinegar | |

Wash the endive and let it drain; break it into pieces to make eating easier. Cut the bacon into bits and fry until crisp; remove the bits from the drippings and drain on paper. Mix salt, sugar, flour, vinegar and cream; stir till blended, then pour into 2 tablespoons of the bacon drippings left in the pan. Over very slow heat stir the mixture till it thickens a bit— don’t let it boil. When the sauce has cooled to lukewarm pour it over the endive and mix it lightly. Garnish it with sliced eggs and bacon bits and serve at once with meat, potatoes, vegetables, or a casserole. It won’t last long.

A FEW RECIPES OF OLD ORDER MENNONITES IN WATERLOO COUNTY, ONTARIO

From Edna Staebler, *Food that Really Schmecks* (Chicago: Follett Publishing Co., 1968), pp. 92-93.

Schnippled Bean Salad (Frenched Bean Salad)

This most popular Waterloo County specialty serves as both salad and vegetable. How many beans to use is a problem: people always eat more than they think they can; one Summer Sunday I had 10 guests for dinner, I used six quarts of fresh yellow beans for the salad and there was just a nappieful left.

1 quart of green or yellow string beans	<i>Dressing:</i> 1 teaspoon sugar
1 smallish onion	1 teaspoon vinegar
Salt and pepper	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup sour cream

Cut the stems off the beans, wash them, then schnippel them— that means cutting the beans on a slant in very thin slices, one bean being cut into 3 or 4 long slices. (Or you could use frozen Frenched beans.) Put the beans into boiling salted water and cook them just long enough to be barely soft. Drain and cool them. Meantime, peel and slice the onion and sprinkle it liberally with salt and stir it around; let it stand at least 15 minutes, giving it a stir now and then. In a bowl large enough to contain the beans, put the sugar, vinegar, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of salt, a good sprinkling of pepper and sour cream. Stir all together.

Now take the salted onion into your hand and with the other hand squeeze as much of the juice out of the onion as you can. Put the squeezed onion into the dressing, pour the drained beans into the bowl and mix with the dressing till all the beans are generously coated— you might need more cream.

Some people like the beans to be slightly warm or hot— but then the dressing becomes thin and runny and doesn't properly coat the beans. Some like the squeezed juice of the onion in the dressing as well as the onions. Some like more onions. If by some strange miscalculation the bean salad isn't all eaten, you can put it in your fridge and keep it for a day or two.

From Edna Staebler, *Food that Really Schmecks* (Chicago: Follett Publishing Co., 1968), p. 48.

Sausages in Beer

Another good old German way.

1½ pounds pork sausage or small sausages	1 tablespoon flour
1 finely minced onion	1 cup brown ale

Boil and brown the sausage, putting the onion with the sausage while it is browning. Take the sausage from the pan, remove excess fat, stir the flour into the pan-juices and onion, add the ale and cook to a smooth sauce. Arrange the sausage on a mound of mashed potatoes with a border of cooked carrots; pour the beer sauce over the carrots.

From Edna Staebler, *More Food that Really Schmecks*, trade paperback edition (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1979, 1998), p. 233.

Repat Editor's note: Apple *schnitz* are segments of peeled and cored apple that are oven-dried to a crisp, then stored in sacks over the Winter, becoming spongy and chewy. They have been very commonly used for cooking and snacking by German immigrant families in North America.

Schnitz or Farmers' Fruit Cake

I can hardly wait to try it— with some of Eva's dried schnitz. The cake was divine— big, rich, moist and with that elusive old-fashioned flavor.

2 cups dried apple schnitz	4 cups flour
2 cups molasses	1 teaspoon cinnamon
1 cup butter or lard	1 teaspoon allspice
2 cups brown sugar	$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon nutmeg
2 eggs, well beaten	2 teaspoons soda
1 cup buttermilk or sour milk	

Soak the apples overnight in water. In the morning drain them and put them through a food chopper (or processor). Simmer the apples in the molasses with the butter for an hour. "If you don't put the butter in, the apples will form into a hard taffy ball", Eva told me. When the apples have cooled add the brown sugar, well-beaten eggs, buttermilk, flour, spices, and soda. Pour into a 9" × 13" pan and bake at 350° for an hour. Test it with a toothpick. The top is crusty and chewy and doesn't need icing which might detract from the fantastic flavor.

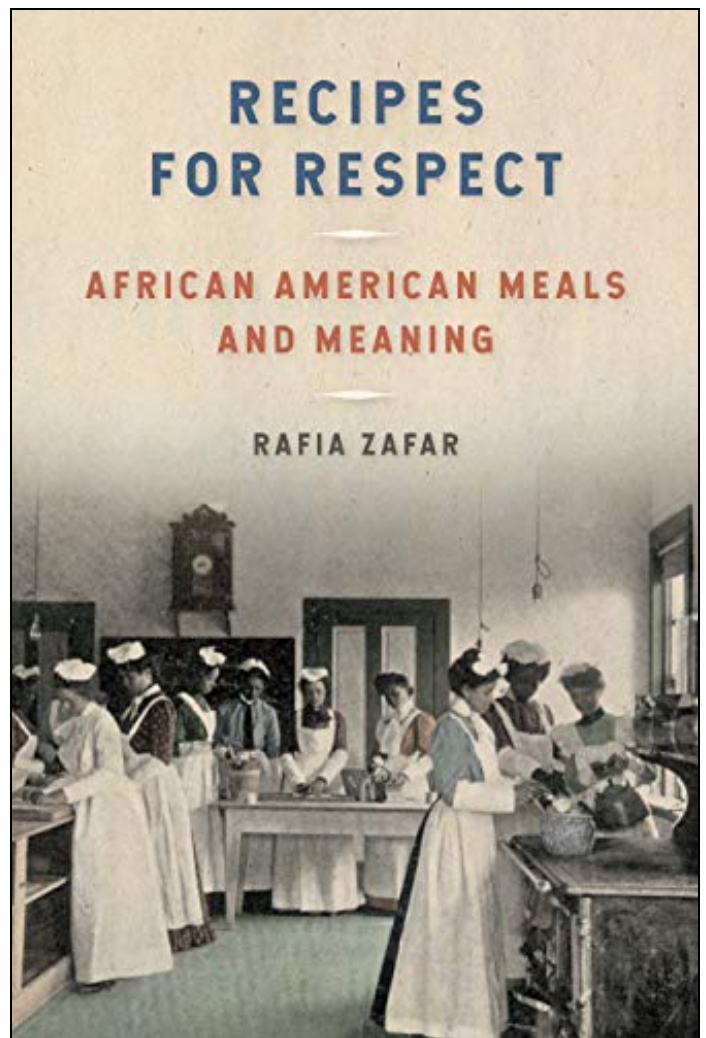
CULINARY WRITINGS AS DOCUMENTS OF AGENCY IN BLACK CULTURE

Rafia Zafar,
Recipes for Respect: African American Meals and Meaning
 (Univ. of Georgia Press/ Southern Foodways Alliance Studies in Culture, People, and Place, 2019)
 148 pp.

reviewed by Leni Sorensen

Leni Ashmore Sorensen, Ph.D., of Crozet, VA, a longtime subscriber and contributor to Repast, is the retired African-American Research Historian at the Monticello estate near Charlottesville. In addition to writing and research focused on foodways and garden ways in African and African-American history, for a quarter-century Dr. Sorensen demonstrated fireplace cookery at museums and historical sites. She runs Indigo House (www.indigohouse.us), her five-acre farmstead in the Blue Ridge Mountains, where she also teaches cooking and canning classes and hosts sit-down, four-course history dinners. Leni's most recent previous article for Repast (Fall 2014) was "Before the American Food Awakening", a retrospective examination of three mid-20th-Century U.S. cookbooks. Her own series of cookbooks, *Through the Seasons*, presents recipes from Mary Randolph's *The Virginia House-Wife* (1824) interpreted for the modern cook. Before her career as a farmer, foodways teacher, and historian, from the late 1950s to the late 1960s, Leni was a singer in an all-female folk group and in the West Coast company of the rock musical "Hair".

The well-deserved attention recently paid to Michael Twitty's *The Cooking Gene* and Toni Tipton-Martin's *The Jemima Code* signal a rising tide of scholarship on Black American cuisine that builds on earlier work by Jessica Harris, Judith Carney, and a recent collection of essays on Chef Edna Lewis. Now we can add *Recipes for Respect: African Meals and Menus* by Rafia Zafar. Since the mid-1990s, Zafar has been a Professor of English, African and African American Studies, and American Culture Studies at Washington University in St. Louis. Prior to that, in the early 1990s she taught at the Univ. of Michigan and was a member of the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor; she gave a talk to CHAA on May 16, 1993, "Cooking Up the Past: Black Women and the Culinary Narrative".



Chapter Titles

1. Recipes for Respect: Black Men's Hospitality Books
2. Born a Slave, Died a Chef: Slave Narratives and the Beginnings of Culinary Memoir
3. "There Is Probably No Subject More Important Than the Study of Food": George Washington Carver's Food Movement
4. Civil Rights and Commensality: Meaning and Meals in Ernest Gaines, Anne Moody, and Alice Walker
5. The Signifying Dish: Autobiography and History in Two Black Women's Cookbooks
6. Elegy or Sankofa? Edna Lewis's *Taste of Country Cooking* and the Question of Genre
7. The Negro Cooks Up His Past: Arturo Schomburg's Uncompleted Cookbook

Professor Zafar has chosen a chronological reflection on 19th- and 20th-Century chefs, hoteliers, cookbook writers, scholars, scientists, civil rights activists, and historians, each of whom in their own way illustrates the vital ways that food has contributed to African American culture beyond the kitchen and dining table. The discussion of individuals in this volume helps fill in gaps in our knowledge.

continued on page 2

THE FIRST, CURSED FAMILY OF “AMERICA’S MOST FAMOUS DESSERT”

Allie Rowbottom,
Jell-O Girls: A Family History
(New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2018)
277 pp.

reviewed by Glenda Bullock

CHAA member Glenda J. Bullock, of Ann Arbor, recently retired from her marketing position at the Univ. of Michigan’s School of Information. Originally from Grand Rapids, MI, she has also lived in Wisconsin and previously worked as a college English teacher. In her spare time she is active in a monthly book group.

LeRoy is a small town in western New York State, about 30 miles southwest of Rochester, with two claims to fame: as the birthplace of Jell-O and as the site where a mysterious, Tourette’s-like illness befell 18 female high school students in 2011-12.

In her book *Jell-O Girls: A Family History*, Allie Rowbottom presents a family memoir that blends the history of the commercial gelatin with the evolution of the American kitchen, the American palate, and the 20th-Century American woman. Her writing chronicles the lives of three generations of “Jell-O girls”—her grandmother, her mother, and herself—and she bookends her memoir with the account of the strangely afflicted high school girls.

Dr. Rowbottom, a writer in Los Angeles who has a Ph.D. in creative writing and literature, is a great-great-great niece of Orator Woodward, the entrepreneur who bought the patent for Jell-O from a cough syrup maker in 1899 for \$450 and built a factory in LeRoy to begin producing and selling the sugary, flavored powder.

Woodward’s genius lay in knowing how to market his acquisition. When sales were slow at first, he sent handsome salesmen in fancy carriages door-to-door to offer samples to the women who answered. Immigrants *en route* to America were served Jell-O on the boat; when they landed at Ellis Island, they received Jell-O molds etched with the company trademark. Small wonder that people began to consider Jell-O “America’s Most Famous Dessert”.

Teaching women became an integral part of Jell-O marketing, says Rowbottom. Those dashing salesmen taught housewives how to use the product; ads included instructions on

JELL-O GIRLS



A FAMILY HISTORY

ALLIE ROWBOTTOM

how to prepare the gelatin and featured specific recipes, “teaching women how to mold their Jell-O,” she writes, “so pliable, so good; teaching them how to mold themselves to match it, pliable and good.”

When sales began to falter in the early 1900s, an artist at the advertising agency with the Jell-O account used his own daughter, Elizabeth, in ads that showed her preparing the dessert. “So easy even a child can make it” the ads proclaimed. Through the following decades, the Jell-O Girl became the face of the product. She appeared in a series of themed recipe booklets published by the company, in which she toured the world with her parrot Polly on her shoulder—having grand adventures, eating Jell-O in exotic lands, and pitying the poor foreign housewives who knew nothing of Jell-O wonders.

The all-American dessert was even depicted in advertising by that ultimate chronicler of idealized Americana, Norman Rockwell. Rowbottom relates, “As the company had with the Jell-O girl... it commissioned Rockwell to mold the ideal Jell-O consumer from a list of prescribed attributes American women had learned to revere.” These women dreamed of prom dates and white weddings and motherhood. “These were the women the Jell-O company wanted to sell to”, she says.

The story of Rowbottom’s grandmother Midge, a former journalist, occupies the early chapters of the book, but the bulk



A 1926 ad for Jell-O, with artwork by Howard Crosby Renwick (also known as Hayden Hayden).

of the narrative is drawn from the intimate, never-published memoir of Midge's daughter Mary—the author's mother. Growing up, Allie Rowbottom says, she resented the time Mary spent in writing the book, but she now realizes that her mother thought of the book as “a spell she wrote to stop her family curse and save herself.”

It is Mary's cousin John who first tells the nine-year-old Mary of “the Jell-O curse”. The curse supposedly falls upon the men of the family, who John claims all come to bad ends before the age of 40. The curse is “‘Money and its attendant problems,’ [John] said, waving at the smoke as he exhaled. ‘The women who chase it, for one.’” The family had sold Jell-O in 1925 for \$67 million in stock to Postum, thus “launching the Woodwards into superwealth.” (The sum is equivalent to roughly \$1 billion in 2020 dollars.)

Rowbottom admits that Jell-O money allowed Mary and herself to live a privileged existence of “art and travel, music and self-expression, a life sung loudly and lived without fear.” Although graphic and gory descriptions of the cancer that eventually claimed the lives of both her grandmother and her mother occupy a good portion of the narrative, at least the

women never had to worry about how to afford hospital bills, health insurance, or an apartment in New York.

Rowbottom finds abundant connections between Jell-O's marketing messages and women's place in the world, which she considers repressed and inhibited. The book's cover illustration of a Barbie-like doll suspended in a crimson crown of molded Jell-O clearly depicts the book's theme: that women of Midge's and Mary's generations were trapped and molded to conform to a domestic ideal, and that this experience across generations can manifest itself in mental and physical illness. She concludes, “We are all connected, we women, we Jell-O girls, bound by a web of common experience, a common language we express through our bodies before we learn it's safe to speak.”

Rowbottom and her mother were fascinated by the bout of sickness that afflicted teen girls in LeRoy in 2011-12, which Rowbottom attributes to the claustrophobic atmosphere of an insular, conservative small town “where satisfaction stems wholly from a well-manicured lawn, a well-manicured hand... a perfect Jell-O salad, so light and clean and wholesome.”

In fact, in seeking the cause of the girls' illness, the town considered whether residual chemicals from the original Jell-O factory, which had closed in 1964, were to blame. The town creek used to run red, orange, or yellow depending on what flavors were being produced that week! Environmental activist Erin Brockovich even paid a visit to LeRoy with her team to test the soil near the high school, but no traces of contamination were ever found. In the end, the generally agreed-upon diagnosis was conversion disorder and mass psychogenic illness (MPI) induced by one charismatic girl with Tourette's Syndrome.

From a homemaker's recipe for “Perfection Salad” (coleslaw suspended in lemon gelatin) whose roots go back to 1905, to the frozen treats called Pudding Pops that were introduced in 1979, Jell-O has wriggled and jiggled its way through economic and cultural upheavals, constantly reinventing and shape-shifting, as Rowbottom states, “from dessert, to salad, to diet food, to snack.” While sales are declining and the author theorizes (somewhat hopefully) that it may soon become a relic of the past, there's hardly a more familiar product on store and home pantry shelves than the white Jell-O box. As venerable and iconic as Campbell's, another century-old brand, and powered by the marketing might of Kraft/Heinz, which now owns the line, it seems likely that “America's Most Famous Dessert” will continue to be served in homes, hospitals, and schools for years to come.

For readers who enjoy culinary history filtered through a confessional feminist lens, *Jell-O Girls* offers a thought-provoking if somewhat didactic excursion. For a more comprehensive history of the product itself, *Jell-O: A Biography* (Harcourt, 2001) by Carolyn Wyman is recommended. Indeed, Rowbottom credits that book with providing much of the history of Jell-O that appears in her own book. ■

WHEN SEEKING COMFORT, LOOK HERE



SAVORING MY BULGARIAN HERITAGE

by Magdalena Mihaylova

Ann Arbor resident Maggie Mihaylova is an undergraduate at the Univ. of Michigan, where she is a rising senior majoring in public policy and is the Magazine Editor at the student newspaper, The Michigan Daily. She worked in Summer 2019 as an editorial intern for the independent news source Bridge Michigan, and in Summer 2020 as a K-12 education policy research intern at Old Dominion Univ. (Norfolk, VA). A graduate of Community High School, Maggie won the Hopwood Undergraduate Poetry Award at the Univ. of Michigan in Fall 2018 for her poem “Dear Bulgaria”.

In the Fall of 2018, when I began my sophomore year at the University of Michigan, I was excited about a lot of things: the new friendships I’d made, the clubs I was finally integrated into, the confidence gained from knowing the campus well. But there was one element I was especially looking forward to. I knew that in the Fall I’d be living off-campus, meaning that I would finally leave the dining hall behind and get to cook my own meals.

Contrary to popular belief, not all college students swear by the dining hall. While I appreciated the abundance of breakfast cereals and the all-you-can-eat soft-serve ice cream machine, I missed the meaning behind making and enjoying meals. As the daughter of Bulgarian immigrants, food was a largely cultural experience in my family as I grew up, both in what we ate and how we ate it. I remember sitting in a high chair by our kitchen island, watching my dad knead *kufleta* meatballs between greased hands, observing my mom line filo dough and feta cheese to make the *banitsa* pastry, and even sticking my own hands in a stretchy doughy mixture to form a loaf of *pitka*. As someone who has never lived in the country of my second culture, I found that I was able to connect with my Bulgarian identity through food.

I was raised on meals shared with family around the table—love sprinkled in as seasoning, conversation filling the empty spaces between bites. Drinks were paired accordingly with the food, and there was meaning even in which glass the *rakia* (plum or grape brandy) was poured into. When guests would come visit, there was always food on the table, from tomatoes and fresh basil to olives and feta cheese. Glasses were refilled as the night progressed, tipsy laughter echoing off their rims. These experiences instilled in me the idea that gath-



The author cooking *leshta chorba* in her college apartment.

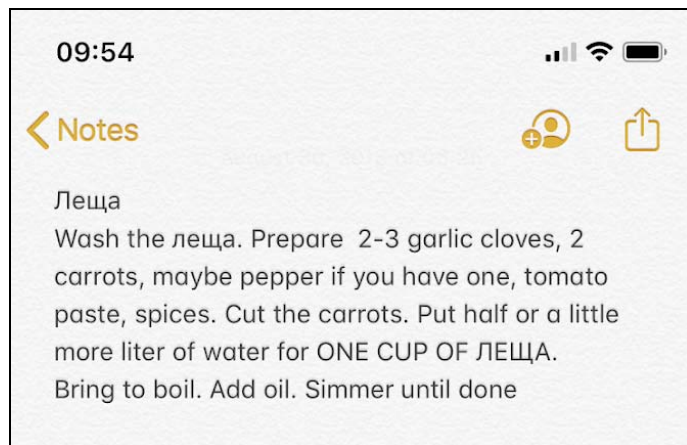
ering around the table is about the exchange not only of food, but of ideas, of moments, of love.

In college, however, this mindset was soon eclipsed—there simply was no time to stop and enjoy meals. Instead, I scarfed down food in the dining hall before rushing to a club meeting, or barely tasted my takeout food as I scribbled away at problem sets in the library. The dining hall never served *palneni chushki* (stuffed peppers) or *tikvenik* (pumpkin strudel), and I often ate alone.

When I finally had my own place and was back in the kitchen, this time not as an observer of my parents’ cooking but as the cook myself, I knew I could do much more than just feed myself. I wanted a reminder of home—I wanted the kitchen to smell like my childhood; I wanted my meals to taste like memories of card games during Christmas.

Lentil Soups and Stews

As a true member of Generation Z, I asked my mom to text me a recipe that I could subsequently copy and paste into the Notes app on my phone. I knew what I wanted to learn to make: *leshta*, or lentil stew. I knew that its warm, soupy texture would make it the perfect comfort food, and that the combination of spices—*paprika*, *chubritza* (commonly trans-



Maggie received this recipe for *leshta* (леща) *chorba* as a text from her mother before pasting it into the Notes app on her smartphone.

lated as Summer savory), parsley, oregano, and more— would provide sharp memories of childhood dinners in each bite. I also valued how *leshta* is very easy to make, basically only requiring that you combine the ingredients in a large pot and boil until done— which also means there are fewer dishes to wash. For an amateur cook and busy college student, it seemed like an acceptable equivalent to the staple lazy meal of ramen. And yet, as I became more comfortable cooking *leshta*, I realized that it could be so much more than that.

Leshta is a type of *chorba*, which is the category of soup and stew dishes from the cuisines of the Balkans, North Africa, Central Europe, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent. Bulgarians eat a variety of *chorbas*, including *shkembe chorba*, a spicy soup made with animal stomach linings; *bob chorba*, or bean stew; and *ribena chorba*, which uses fish.

Leshta chorba, a phrase often shortened to simply “*leshta*”, is lentil stew. It is typically made with brown or green lentils, onion, garlic, tomatoes, carrots, bell pepper, and celery, although some of these vegetables can be omitted if the cook so chooses. It is seasoned with the aforementioned *chubritza*, paprika, parsley, bay leaves, sometimes mint, and sometimes chili powder— although the dish is not widely known to be spicy. It is often paired with bread, and sometimes yogurt.

When consumed with less liquid, and garnished with a little bit of olive or sunflower oil, the dish is known as *leshta plakia* as opposed to its sister, *leshta chorba*. There is also *leshta yahniya*, which is similar to *leshta plakia* but uses olive or sunflower oil to stir-fry the onion before boiling.

Leshta is not an extravagant or fancy meal; rather, it is an affordable, easy, and quick dish, which perhaps accounts for much of its popularity. The dish is not associated with any particular holiday or special event, and is a common lunch or dinner dish that is usually accompanied by an appetizer or another main course, like salad or some type of meat.

My family has always made *leshta plakia*, preferring the chunkier nature of the stew rather than the watery *chorba* version. Ironically, however, when I first began making *leshta* in my college house, I seemed to only be able to make *leshta chorba*. Whether it was because of the much-weaker rental-house stovetops or the rushed nature of cooking during the academic year, I always ended up with a soupy finished product, which meant leaky Tupperwares and scrubbing my backpack clean in the bathroom of the Michigan Union.

How to Make *Leshta*

To make *leshta*, you begin by cleaning and sifting through either brown or green dried lentils. Accomplished Bulgarian cooks will soak their lentils before cooking to create a faster and even boil. As the lentils soak, cut the vegetables— I opt for chunkier, large pieces, whereas others prefer smaller and thinner cuts. It is important, however, to make sure to adjust the cooking time; I’ve had *leshtas* fail because the carrots barely cooked through while the bell peppers were soggy.

After everything is prepared, add the ingredients to a large pot and add enough water to cover the lentils. Instead of adding pure tomatoes, my family opts for tomato paste, which blends in nicely with the water and gives an even spread of the flavor and color. Preliminary seasoning should occur here, with salt and pepper, paprika, parsley, or other add-ins as men-

continued on next page



The Mihaylova family’s clay pot, ideal for serving *leshta* and other *chorbas*.

BULGARIAN

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tioned above. Then, bring the pot to a boil, add the oil, and simmer until done. Once the leshta is completed, sprinkle some *chubritza* on top and cover for a few minutes before stirring.

As simple as leshta is to make, it fills the room with its presence— smells of spice and earthiness reaching all throughout the kitchen and house. I would recommend opening windows or ventilating while cooking, unless you want your home to smell of a delicious but sometimes overpowering stew. In that same college house where I made my first leshta, the smell of bubbling lentils and paprika would waft up even to my room in the attic. The following year, when I lived in a different off-campus house, my room happened to be attached to the kitchen, and on the days I made leshta (and forgot to close the door to my room) the smell would linger in my pillow for even a few days after cooking.

Continuing the Traditions

“Bulgarian food seems so...rustic,” a friend said to me as I served him my homemade leshta one Sunday afternoon last fall. Lounging on my porch in the October sunlight, we were discussing the cuisines of our respective cultures, and I realized that many of the Bulgarian foods I grew up eating were stews. Just as there are multiple versions of leshta, including a leshta yahniya, there are multiple versions of yahniya!

As I described to my friend the differences between the stews I grew up eating— some made up of big chunks of potato, carrot, and chicken; some involving a diverse array of spices, beans, and vegetables— I began musing on why Bulgarians eat so many stews. Of course, much of Bulgarian cuisine is made up of pastries, meats, and salads, but in my family particularly there was always a focus on stews (perhaps presaging our eventual vegetarianism). And indeed, there is something “rustic” in preparing and eating a stew. If you order a stew in a Bulgarian restaurant, it will often be served in a clay pot, whose aesthetic speaks of tradition, simplicity, and earthiness.

It is for this reason that I make leshta so often while at school, and why I’ve always loved family dinners that involve pulling out our own clay pot. Just as food connects me to my Bulgarian identity, dishes like leshta pull me in even closer, letting imagination and history mingle in my mind. Even though I’m an American who grew up solely in a Midwestern town, each time I feel the sifting of lentils between my palms or feel the sharp smell of paprika as it churns on the stovetop, I feel myself connecting with my relatives overseas and with the cultural part of my soul. In those moments, I marvel at how even in 2020, as I cook via a recipe on my cell phone, I feel connected to my ancestors— who hundreds of years ago made the same food, sharing it over laughter and drink, just as my friend and I were doing on my porch that October day, the sun shining over us in warm approval. ■



The table at a Mihaylova family Christmas dinner, with dishes including *bob chorba* (bean stew) and *lozovi sarmi* (stuffed grape leaves).

RAQUEL B. AGRANOFF, 87

May 5, 1933 - June 30, 2020

The well-known local chef and restaurateur Ricky Agranoff, a key member of the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor in its early years, passed away in Ann Arbor recently and was interred at Arborcrest Memorial Park. She and her husband, Bernard W. Agranoff, who survives her, were CHAA members from the late 1980s until 2016. Ricky will be fondly remembered not only for her sharp culinary expertise but also for her warmth, generosity, humor, and love of life.

Raquel Betty Schwartz grew up in Randolph, a suburb south of Boston. Her formative experiences in cuisine included learning how to make borscht and blintzes from her grandmother; living in the Philippines in her early 20s for two years with her father and his second wife and family (she also starred back then in some Filipino films under the screen name Ricky Blake); and, following her marriage to Dr. Agranoff in her late 20s, private lessons in haute cuisine from the chef James Beard in New York.

The couple moved to Ann Arbor when Bernie was hired as a research scientist at the Univ. of Michigan in 1962 (he would retire there in 2003 as a professor of neurosciences and biological chemistry). Soon, Ricky launched a cooking school and catering company called A La Carte, and she was hired as the first manager of Kitchen Port when that store opened in 1968. Later, to further refine her skills she completed an internship at the renowned restaurant Troisgros in France. After returning to Ann Arbor, she teamed up with Pat Pooley and three other women to establish an eatery, The Moveable Feast. Ricky and Pat recounted their experiences there as part of a CHAA panel discussion in Sep. 1988, and later in their CHAA talk, "Moveable Feast Memories" in Oct. 2003. Having met one another in a women's group, and inspired by Julia Child's cookery, the five women had begun The Moveable Feast in 1977 as a small bakery/ café in the Kerrytown shops, where they sold their own French sourdough bread, croissants, fruit tarts, patés, and quiches, and catered for large affairs and charity events. In Nov. 1980, they expanded to a restored 1870 house on the Old West Side, where they set a high standard of cooking excellence and slow-paced elegance for other Ann Arbor restaurants to follow. Ricky also organized many local cooking demonstrations and courses, where she taught how to prepare everything from salmon *coulbiac* to an Indonesian *rijsttafel*.

In her CHAA talk "A Travelling Gourmet in China" (Jan. 1990) and in a pair of articles in the Fall 1989 issue of this newsletter, Ricky described the cuisine that she and Bernie had encountered during a five-week trip around China, where he was guest-lecturing that Fall. "Since we are both very interested in food," she wrote, "we made it a point to seek out the interesting culinary experiences." At one point she was asked to organize an impromptu Western cooking lesson for the staff at a restaurant in Guilin, a city in the Guangxi autonomous region—a request that she carried out with aplomb. She concluded: "The nicest part of this whole experience was to realize again that the language of food is really universal. From my experience years ago in the Troisgros kitchens in France to the middle of China and all the



places in between, my interest in food has enriched my life over and over again."

In the Fall 1993 issue of *Repast*, Ricky reported on the annual conference of the International Association of Culinary Professionals in New Orleans. Four years earlier, she had earned the IACP's coveted Certified Culinary Professional (CCP) designation. With three other women she had then co-founded and -led the local chapter of the gastronomic organization Les Dames D'Escoffier, based at the City Club on Washtenaw Avenue. Later in the 1990s she and Bernie joined a local wine and food appreciation group, The Whinos. The Moveable Feast restaurant was sold in 1997, and the café in Kerrytown was closed soon after.

Ricky published the cookbooks *Cooking in Porcelain* (1996) and *Risottos, Paellas, and Other Rice Specialties* (1997), both with Nitty Gritty Press (part of Bristol Publishing in California), and she teamed up with local writer Lois Kane to write *Ann Arbor Fresh!: Recipes and Stories from the Ann Arbor Farmer's Market and the Kerrytown Historic District* (self-published in 1998).

In addition to her husband, Ricky is survived by sons Adam (in Ann Arbor) and William (in Seattle), three half-siblings, and four grandchildren. Donations in her memory can be made to the University Musical Society (UMS). She and Bernie were keen supporters of UMS over the years, along with other local organizations including the Food Gatherers anti-hunger program, the Neutral Zone teen center, and the UM Center for the Education of Women (CEW). ■

A HUNDRED YEARS OF GRILLING WITH KINGSFORD HAS LEFT ITS MARKS

by Randy K. Schwartz

In a typical year, the Kingsford company produces over a billion pounds of charcoal briquettes, more than anyone else in the world. The founding of that charcoal venture a century ago, in 1920, was the beginning of an important chapter in the history of cooking, since the widespread availability of inexpensive briquettes made auto camping, home barbecuing, and other forms of outdoors cooking much easier in the U.S. and elsewhere.

Interestingly, Kingsford, now owned by the Clorox Company, began in Michigan as a sideline of the Ford Motor Co. Back then, every Ford Model T automobile needed about 100 board feet of wood for the frame, wheel spokes, dash board, and running board. Rather than continue to purchase the wood from a supplier, Henry Ford wanted to own and harvest his own timberland. His wife's cousin by marriage, Edward G. Kingsford, who was a real estate agent, timber salesman, and Ford auto dealer in the Upper Peninsula, entered into a partnership with Ford that proceeded to acquire more than 313,000 acres near Iron Mountain. In just one year, by 1920 Ford and Kingsford had built a sawmill, a five-story wood carbonization and distillation plant, a parts plant, a hydroelectric dam on the adjacent Menominee River, and a company town named Kingsford with 3000 residents.

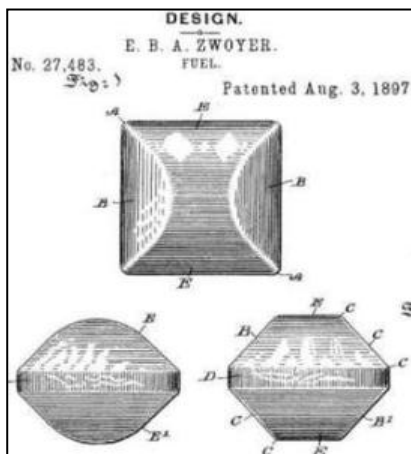
Image: Collections of The Henry Ford. Object ID: 64.167.270.26



Once the operation got underway, Ford, the famously frugal multimillionaire, couldn't bear seeing all the stumps, branches, and sawdust that were being wasted at the mill. He decided to have the wood waste converted into charcoal for sale to meat and fish smokehouses and to consumers. The Ford charcoal briquette factory, sited next to the sawmill, was designed by Thomas Edison and run by Edward Kingsford.

At left, briquettes being bagged at the Ford factory in northern Michigan, 1935.

Collections of The Henry Ford. Object ID: 64.167.833.P.62876



Although Ford was the first to market such a briquette nationally, neither he nor Edison had invented it. Back in the 1890s two coal company executives in Philadelphia, William P. Taggart and Ellsworth Benjamin A. Zwoyer, patented designs for pillow-shaped nuggets of densely packed charcoal and for the machinery to produce them.¹ After the turn of the century, scientists discovered that mixing the wood charcoal with a binder of tar and corn starch results in a briquette that gives a prolonged burn with an intense, even heat, limited smoke, and little or no flying ashes or dangerous flames.

Ford shortened the name of the item from “briquettes” to “briquets”, mass-produced bags of them, and sold the bags (or sometimes gave them away in promotions) exclusively at his auto dealerships. The advertising touted them as a “Fuel of a Hundred Uses... for Barbecues - Picnics - Hotels - Restaurants - Ships - Clubs - Homes - Railroads - Trucks - Foundries - Tinsmiths - Meat Smoking - Tobacco Curing”.

Image: Daris A. Nevil via Wikimedia



Long-distance auto travel was still in its infancy in the 1920s, and there were generally no roadside eateries or even gasoline stations situated between towns. People started to make lengthy car trips by staying at a roadside camp each night, and cooking their own meals over campfires. In 1922, there were about 6,000 auto camps in the U.S. One of the largest, Overland Park near Denver, had space for 2000 cars and tents.

One factor that greatly swelled the popularity of auto camping was the heavy reporting every Summer on the vacation road trip made by The Vagabonds, a group of industrialist best-buddies that usually included Ford, Edison, Firestone, and one or two others.²

At right, “The Vagabonds” on an auto camping trip:
L to R, Firestone, Ford, Edison, and Kingsford.



continued on next page

KINGSFORD *continued from page 17*

In the midst of the Great Depression and World War 2, from 1935 to 1945 Ford dealers sold a Picnic Kit complete with Ford Charcoal Briquets and a portable grill. Its packaging invited buyers: "Enjoy a modern picnic. Sizzling meats, steaming coffee, toasted sandwiches." Elsewhere, motorists could buy lean-to tents that attached to their automobile, or platforms that fit inside the car for sleeping. Alas, over time the auto camps became a victim of their huge success. They had made road tripping so popular that fast-food joints and other restaurants began to spring up along the sides of roads, and motorists usually chose that convenience over fixing their own meals at campsites. In 1951, four years after Henry Ford's death, Ford Charcoal was sold to a group of businessmen who renamed it Kingsford Chemical Company.³



From the Collections of The Henry Ford. Object ID: 2004.70.2



An illustration from the catalog *Bemis Camper's Manual* (1936)



After World War 2, the rise of middle-class prosperity, home ownership, and suburban migration enlarged the number of people attracted to cooking in backyards. The owners of Kingsford Chemical targeted this demographic and convinced the major grocery chains to stock their briquettes. Curiously, men—the same ones who would never have dreamt of manning a stove or an oven inside the kitchen—were proud to be masters of backyard grilling operations. This was thanks in part to the influence of *Cook It Outdoors* (1941), one of the earliest books by the chef James Beard. When he was growing up, Beard had done many cookouts with his mother in the beachside resort town of Gearhart, Oregon.

At left, detail from a magazine ad by the American Meat Institute (1946)

The Weber grill was another critical part of this development—although its invention was inspired by conventional messy charcoal rather than compressed briquettes. CHAA member Judy Steeh summarized this point as part of a 2015 talk on postwar American cooking:

The classic American charcoal grill hit American backyards in 1952, when a man named George Stephen invented the first Weber. Stephen was a welder at the Weber Brother Metal Works, outside of Chicago, where he made sheet-metal spheres into buoys for the Coast Guard. One day, grilling in his backyard, he got fed up with how the ash from the coals in his shallow grill kept getting on his food. He decided to make his own by cutting one of the metal spheres from work in half and adding legs. His neighbors [later] called it "Sputnik", but the deep kettle design kept ash out of the food, and, after some tweaks (and vent holes) were added, George could control the coals' heat much better than he could with his store-bought grill. The design quickly caught on, Weber began manufacturing it, and a modern grilling icon spread across the country. And what were we grilling in 1952? Steaks, steaks, and more steaks, with the occasional hamburger or hot dog thrown in for variety – never mind chicken, fish, or (heaven forbid) veggies!⁴

Image: Weber-Stephen Products LLC via *Smithsonian* magazine



A 1963 article in Reader's Digest commented, "Cooking with charcoal... is now as deeply ingrained in American life as the long weekend and the servantless kitchen." The briquettes themselves were cheap but the other ingredients— a home with a backyard, a grill, and hunks of meat— were definitely not, so cookouts became a middle-class status symbol. A rear patio, deck, or yard allows some of the same privacy as an indoors kitchen, but few grillers would have objected to their neighbors seeing, hearing, or sniffing what they were up to— on the contrary! Bragging and conformity might seem incompatible, but they combined well in suburbs all across America. A pair of writers in New York City poked fun at this in a song recorded by The Monkees in 1967:

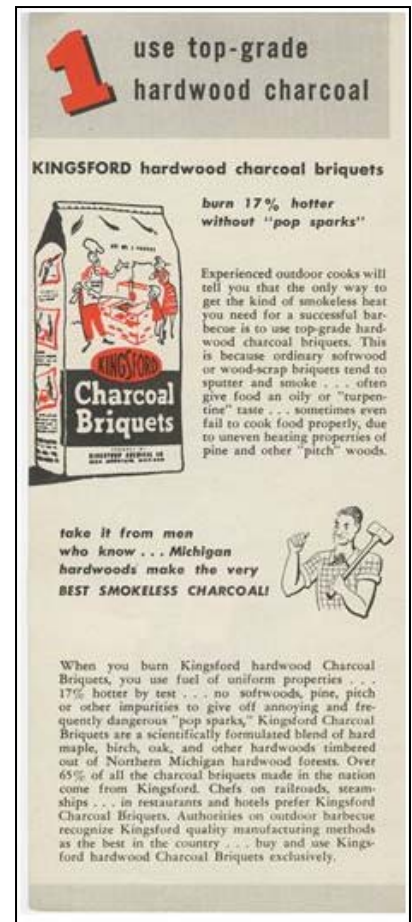
The local rock group down the street
Is trying hard to learn their song
They serenade the weekend squire
Who just came out to mow his lawn.

Another Pleasant Valley Sunday
Charcoal burning everywhere
Rows of houses that are all the same
And no one seems to care.

Creature comfort goals, they only numb my soul
And make it hard for me to see
Ah, thoughts all seem to stray to places far away
I need a change of scenery.

Another Pleasant Valley Sunday
Charcoal burning everywhere
Another Pleasant Valley Sunday
Here in status symbol land.⁵

At right, a 1950s Kingsford consumer brochure, "How to Have a Successful Barbecue", urged readers to "take it from men who know... Michigan hardwoods make the very BEST SMOKELESS CHARCOAL"



Even though Henry Ford was notoriously small-minded when it came to equality and a welcoming atmosphere in America, in the final analysis his cars and his charcoal briquettes, alongside many other mass-produced consumer goods, had a democratizing influence. They made it more possible for all groups of people to come together to prepare and enjoy food in outdoors settings: from backyard cookouts to barbecue cook-offs, from quiet campfires to campaign rallies, and from ethnic street fairs to picnics in public parks. Clearly, American culture is all the richer for that. ■

At left, a young man of West Indian heritage barbecues a whole pig for a picnic in Prospect Park in Brooklyn, NY, in September 1978. He's hand-turning a rotisserie spit over a pit of glowing Kingsford Charcoal Briquets. Also visible are cases of Pepsi Cola, Pony 8-Packs of Miller beer, and a cassette-radio "boom-box".

Photo: Neal Boenzi/ *New York Times*.

References

1. Guy Forstrom, "Kingsford Fuel: The Burning History of Charcoal Briquettes", *Iron Mountain Daily News*, Dec 30, 2017, <https://www.ironmountaindailynews.com/news/local-news/2017/12/kingsford-fuel-the-burning-history-of-charcoal-briquettes>.
2. Jeff Guinn, *The Vagabonds: The Story of Henry Ford and Thomas Edison's Ten-Year Road Trip* (Simon & Schuster, 2019).
3. Ken Zurski, "Kingsford Chemical Company: Henry Ford, 'The Vagabonds', and the Birthplace of the Charcoal Briquet", *Unremembered History*, May 23, 2017 (updated June 5, 2019), <https://unrememberedhistory.com>.
4. Judy Steeh, "Postwar American Cooking", a talk presented to the Americana Interest Group of the AAUW Ann Arbor chapter, Mar. 23, 2015.
5. Excerpts from "Pleasant Valley Sunday", lyrics by Carole King and Gerry Goffin. © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC.

CHAA CALENDAR

(Except where noted, programs are scheduled for 3:00 – 5:00 p.m. at
the Ann Arbor District Library – Malletts Creek Branch, 3090 E. Eisenhower Parkway.)

Sunday, September 20, 2020

Frances Kai-Hwa Wang,
journalist, speaker, and educator,
“Chinese Food: Customs and Culture”

Sunday, October 18, 2020

Barbara J. Barton, endangered-species biologist,
“*Manoomin*: The Story of Wild Rice in Michigan”

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

- Fall 2020: Culinary History in England, Part 1
- Winter 2021: unthemed
- Spring and Summer 2021: Culinary History in England, Parts 2-3
- Fall 2021: unthemed.

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First Class