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Repast

Quarterly Publication of the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

Freshly Squeezed

Fruits of the World and How to Use Them, Part 2



Jorge López Pérez/ *El Universal* (San Luis Potosí, Mexico)

Fruits ripening on a Prickly Pear cactus in the plant's native region, Central Mexico.

Remembering Jan Longone
(1933-2022)
See pages 23-33

DATE SYRUP

continued from page 16

The reviewer made this Iranian dish of lamb roasted with carrot, onion, and *bahārāt* spice rub (p. 117 in the cookbook), which is eaten with garlic *torshī* pickles (p. 223). Here, it's served drizzled with *ṭahīnah* and plated with white rice and crunchy julienned radish. Both the rub and the pickles rely on *dibs*.

Repast

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Editor.....Randy K. Schwartz
CHAA President.....Mariam van Deventer Breed
CHAA Program Chair.....Glenda Bullock
CHAA Treasurer.....William Walker
CHAA Website Editor.....Glenda Bullock



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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

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Some of the recipes would have benefited from more careful editing. Ingredients are sometimes specified vaguely without size or weight (“1 joint of lamb”, p. 117; “4 pita bread pieces”, p. 163). Further: should those pita pieces— and the *sha’riyyah* noodles in another dessert (p. 167)— end up crispy or chewy? Should those walnuts or almonds be added raw, or roasted first (pp. 55, 163, 219)? In several other cases, ingredients called for in the cooking instructions are missing from the list of ingredients (pp. 117, 125), or even worse, key items in the ingredients list are never even mentioned in the cooking instructions (pp. 167, 213). The elaborate dish of sweet-and-sour salmon with raisin and *dibs* sauce (p. 103) is claimed to require “just half an hour” to prepare.

Despite such shortcomings, however, this volume has been an extremely welcome addition to my kitchen and bookshelf. It reaches across continents, as well as back in time, to educate us about an ancient Asian product that’s been neglected in modern Western cuisine. Date syrup, it turns out, is a fine, versatile ingredient that will spark the creativity of everyone who uses it. We owe Michael Rakowitz and his friends a debt of gratitude for the energies that they brought to this project. ■

THE ART OF PRESERVING MANGOES IN EARLY DOCUMENTS AND COOKBOOKS OF DHAKA

text and photos by Anique Afshan Newaz

Anique Newaz is a freelance writer originally from Dhaka, in what is now Bangladesh. She and her husband Golam are Repast subscribers who live in Ann Arbor. Anique's previous article in these pages was, "Memories of Making Biryani with My Grandmother" (Winter 2017).

Dhaka, Bangladesh, an ancient capital in South Asia with a rich culinary history, has a long tradition of dishes using mango. The fruit is known there as *aam* (pronounced "ahm"), a word of ancient Sanskrit origin. Green (unripe) mangoes, for example, are often teamed with *dal* (lentils), as in *khichuri*, a dish of lentils and rice. Urban families make ice cream with ripe yellow mangoes, and serve cut-up pieces of ripe mangoes in home-made custard.

But mangoes, like most fruits and vegetables, are seasonal. Finding ways to enjoy such products all year long by preserving them became an important household tradition. This article will focus on the rich historical customs of preparing preserved-mango foods, especially those using raw green mango. It will show how households have engaged in the art of preserving mango in order to enjoy the fruit from one harvest season until the arrival of the next season. Examples to be discussed include mango *murubba*, a sweet preserve; mango *achaar*, a sweet and sour pickle; mango chutney; mango "fruit leather" bars (*aamshotto*); and mango *shorbot*, a sweet beverage.

Across South Asia, the mango is the king of fruits. If free of fiber, the flesh of the mango is smooth, silky and delicious. As seen in what follows, this luscious fruit has been an integral part of Bangladeshi cuisine, culture, and life.

Varieties of Mango

The mango tree is a flowering plant that can grow to an impressive height of about 100 feet. The species *Mangifera indica* is indigenous in the eastern region of the Indian subcontinent, including Bangladesh, and *Mangifera laurina* in the Malayan re-



Green (unripe) mangoes.

gion of Southeast Asia. The genus name *Mangifera* and the English word "mango" are derived from the Portuguese *manga*, which in turn originated with the Malay *mangga* and the Tamil *mankay*.¹

Bangladesh produces a staggeringly rich variety of the species *Mangifera indica*, and the fruits are harvested mainly in the Summer months. The trees thrive in diverse agro-climactic conditions, including both tropical and subtropical climates. There are two types, referred to as the *elite* and the *desi* or *deshi* ("local, native") type. Elite designates the superior variety; these are propagated by professional grafting, rather than by growing a seedling from a planted kernel.² The northern Bangladesh districts of Rajshahi and Chapain Nawabganj are famous for producing the best ones. The *Langra Aam* (literally "the King of Mangoes") is probably the most delicious single variety and truly fits its name. It is free of fiber, smooth, with supreme taste and quality. A few of the others belonging in the elite variety are *Himsagar*, *Gopalbhog*, *Fazli*, and *Bombai*.³

People in Bangladesh grow various types of *desi* mangoes in their own farms, gardens, homesteads and courtyards. At harvest time, in villages all over the countryside, little children expertly climb the mango trees and eat the fruits right there. What a great sight it is to see the poor children savor the fruit and pluck them for the women at home to prepare and use all year long.

Historical Sources

Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty in 1526, described the mango tree in great detail in his autobiography, the *Baburnama*.⁴ It was the Mughals who established the first organized mango orchards, planting the trees in columns, which made harvesting more efficient and enhanced the beauty of the or-

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Recipe for *Murubba*

(Sweet Mango Preserve)

Summarized from Tayyeba Huq,
Shasthya, Khadya o' Ranna.¹⁵

Take several carefully-peeled green mangoes and soak in several changes of cool water. The kernel (pit) should be soft and easy to remove. The fibrous part of the flesh attached to the pit should be carefully cut off and discarded, or else the *murubba* will get a blackish tinge from it. Use a palm needle, or a long metal needle, or a fork, to gently pierce the pieces, and avoid breaking the fruit. The water needs to be gently squeezed out each time the mangoes are soaked.

Soak the squeezed mango pieces in sugar syrup for a day, then cook the mixture gently at medium heat (to make a sugar syrup, the weight of sugar should be between 75% and 100% of the weight of the fruit). Cover and leave the mangoes in the syrup on the stove for two days, gently heating them occasionally for half an hour at a time; they will become translucent. Finally, bring them to a boil, let cool, and transfer to sterilized jars or bottles. [In this chapter, complete bottling instructions are given for mango *murubba*.]



Anique Newaz's *murubba*, home-made with green mangoes, with a few strands of saffron added to enhance color and taste.

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chard as a whole as well as the individual trees. The Mughal emperor Akbar, who ruled the Indian subcontinent in 1556-1605, is credited with developing an orchard of 100,000 mango trees near Darbhanga, in the Bihar region.⁵ Among the many South Asian writers that have sung in praise of the mango, Mirza Ghalib (1797-1869) was a Mughal poet of the British Raj era who composed verses on its delicate taste and virtues, calling it a fruit from paradise.⁶

Mughal culinary customs found a foothold in many regions of the subcontinent, and reached what is now Bangladesh when Mughal rule was established there under Akbar in the late 1500s. "Dhaka Cuisine in the Mughal Era", a chapter in the special commemorative book *Celebration of 400 years of Capital Dhaka: Dhakai Khabar*, documents these Mughal contributions to the history of *Dhakai khabar* (Dhaka cuisine). Dhaka, built as a fort city, would earn a prominent place in this history for the cooking of such Mughal-inspired dishes as biryani, kababs, and whole-chicken roasts with native spices.⁷ It is notable that such fare is greatly complemented by mango chutneys and other condiments. The chapter by Siddiq Kabir on "Preserved Foods" dwells on the resulting historical traditions of items such as chutneys and other pickles, and sweet *murubba*.⁸

Hakim Habibur Rahman (1881-1947) is the scholar most often cited for recording the traditions surrounding the art of making special preserved fruits and vegetables as practiced by women in Dhaka households. Rahman was a physician and a versatile member of an aristocratic Yunani (Indo-Greek) family of Dhaka, which was then part of Eastern Bengal. He diligently recorded life and society there, including its culinary techniques and traditions, and reported his observations in a book, *Dhaka Panchas Baras Pehele* (1949). He admired the skill and expertise of the women in preparing *murubbas*, which he said they

generally made with pineapple, mango, or carrot.⁹ *Murubbas* have also historically been made with unripe wood apple (*bel*).

Mango *Murubba*

In the above box, I have included a detailed recipe for mango *murubba* from my aunt Tayyeba Huq's book, *Shasthya, Khadya o' Ranna* ("Health, Food and Cooking"). Published in 1965, this was the earliest book written in the vernacular Bengali language from this part of Bengal (then East Pakistan), and was the first cookbook ever issued by the Bangla Academy. The author's goal was to aid women or housewives in their overall knowledge of nutrition, cooking, home economics, menu options, and techniques for bottling and preserving fruits and vegetables.

Huq commented that in Dhaka and other parts of the country, mango *murubba* is eaten with milk or with cream, the latter often made at home using the creamy, thickened milk collected from the surface when milk is scalded. *Murubba* is also eaten as *aam bhaat*, which is with rice and milk. *Aamer murubba* (mango *murubba*), or, alternatively, *anaroshor murubba* (pineapple *murubba*), can be cut into very small pieces and incorporated into desserts such as cakes and zardas. (*Zarda* is a category of traditional South Asian pudding, made by cooking rice grains or wheat vermicelli noodles in *ghee* and/or milk, often flavored with saffron and/or cardamom.)

The same cookbook by Huq includes more than 10 other mango recipes, such as mango Kashmiri chutney, mango jam, mango *shorbot*, mango ice-cream, mango bars (*aamshotto*), mango sauce, green mango in lentils, and mango in lentil-rice *Khichuri*.

As seen in Huq's recipe, *aamer murubba* (mango *murubba*) is typically sweetened with regular sugar syrup. But another vari-

Recipe for Kashmiri *Achaar*

(Sweet and Sour Mango Pickle
with Cayenne Pepper)

From Anique Newaz, *Best of
Bangladeshi Cuisine*.¹⁶

(Following instructions in the original text by Tayyeba Huq, this recipe advises drying the mango and other ingredients in the sun, although the articles in the commemorative book edited by Khatun and Khatun said there is no need for this.)

Makes approximately 2 medium jars of *achaar* using 4 cups of sliced mangoes.

Peel green mangoes and remove kernel. If it is hard to remove the kernel, carefully cut deep lines longitudinally and slice. Scrape carefully where the kernel is embedded. Cut mango into 1/5-inch slices or small squares.

For every 4 cups of sliced mango, take:

½ Tbsp. salt to rub

1½ Tbsp. each thinly sliced or slivered
ginger and garlic

1 Tbsp. dried red cayenne pepper (seeds removed), clipped
into pieces

1 cup white vinegar

1-3 cups sugar, according to preference.

(The amount of sugar is increased to preserve the *achaar* for
a longer period.)

Rub the mango slices with salt and place on a plate to dry
in the sun for several hours. In rainy season, rub with sugar
instead of salt. Rinse and strain off water. Pat mangoes dry
with towel.



Anique Newaz's home-made Kashmiri *Achaar*, or
sweet and sour pickle made from raw green mango.

Make syrup by combining the vinegar and sugar, adding
the sugar slowly. (If vinegar is particularly strong, it can be
diluted first with a little water.) Bring this to a boil, add the
mangoes and spices, and bring back to a boil in very gentle
heat, until mangoes become translucent and soft. Pour this
hot *achaar* into sterilized jars. Cool completely before
placing the lid.

ety called *gurumba* is instead sweetened with *khejur gur* (literally
“date molasses”), a syrup made from the sap of date palms. The
Bengali linguist and historian Sukumar Sen (1900-1992) recorded
such traditions of Eastern Bengal. He mentioned that a sweet,
tasty dish is made from green mango, *khejur gur*, and a pinch of
ground cloves. It can be called *aamgur* or *guraam*, both
compounds of *aam* (mango) and *gur* (molasses).¹⁰ In the
preparation of this dish, in order to further mitigate the sourness
of raw green mango, the halved or quartered pieces of peeled fruit
would be placed on a rolling-board or a *barkosh* (wooden tray),
pricked all over with a special kind of fine needle (itself made
from a date palm), squeezed gently, then placed in a bowl of
successively-refreshed clean water. Copper needles were
eventually used for this purpose, and fine forks are used today.¹¹

Pickle, Chutney, and the Colonial Connection

The most popular mango preparation of Bangladesh is the
sweet and sour pickle called Kashmiri *achaar*. Most households
know how to make this and to serve it on special occasions with
biryani, rice pilaf, meat dishes such as chicken and lamb roasts,

or with simple everyday foods like lentils, curry, and rice. Bengali
women prepare *achaar* in many varieties, and the same is true for
chutney, which is similar but is sometimes made without a souring
agent such as vinegar. The above box contains a recipe for
Kashmiri *achaar* from Tayyeba Huq's original book, using the
version that I translated and adapted for publication in English.

The British colonials who ruled the Indian subcontinent until
75 years ago, in 1947, popularized mango chutney and introduced
it to the world. Major Grey's Chutney, an English commercial
product and the most recognizable chutney on grocery shelves, is
a reminder of the days of British rule, their lifestyle and their love
of Indian cuisine. “Nowadays, jars of chutneys, pickles and curry
powder are seen on every British supermarket shelf”, writes David
Burton in his *The Raj at Table*, a book about all of the ‘curried
food’ that the British enjoyed on the subcontinent.¹²

Burton's Chapter 17 addresses “Chutneys, Pickles and
Preserves”. Even long before the Raj (1857-1947), he notes, a
servant with the East India Company had contrasted the mango

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with fruits that were already familiar in Europe, finding its taste superior to that of the nectarine, peach, and apricot. “Of the many new fruits the British encountered in India,” Burton continues, “it was the mango which most caught their fancy.” The recipe for mango chutney in *The Raj at Table* is similar to Kashmiri *achaar* in its ingredients, including raw ginger and garlic, dried red chilies, sugar, and vinegar.

Aamshotto or Mango Fruit Leather

Aamshotto, another traditional preserved-mango product, is a dried bar or roll-up made from the pulp of ripe mangoes.¹³ If the mango flesh is fibrous, then it is strained through a sieve or fine-holed strainer to remove the fiber, resulting in a smooth, juicy pulp. In Bangladesh, some women will add a bit of spice such as ground cayenne pepper, *chaat masala*, and a pinch of salt. Then the pulp is spread evenly on large, flat, lightly-oiled metal pans or pot lids and allowed to dry in the sun; if there is not enough sun, then the drying is done in a slow oven. After the first layer is dry, a second layer of pulp is spread over it and dried; and this is repeated with one or more additional layers. The result is a slab of mango “leather” that can be sliced into rectangular bars or bite-sized squares.

Delicious *aamshotto* can also be prepared using canned mango pulp and modern kitchen equipment. Machine-blend the canned pulp to ensure that it is smooth and with no solid pieces of mango remaining. On a 9 × 11 or 11 × 13-in. nonstick metal cookie-baking sheet or jam roll tray, spread 1½-2 cups of the pulp evenly, in a layer not too thick nor thin. Bake at 170° F. for 5-6 hours. (To check for doneness: the *aamshotto* should feel dry, shiny, and not soft at any part; if some parts remain soft, place it back in the oven to dry further.) This single-layer version of *aamshotto* can also be rolled up to be eaten, much like today’s commercial “fruit roll-ups”.

Mango *Shorbot* Beverage

The cookbook by Tayyeba Huq gives directions for making a mango beverage of the type called *shorbot*, including the method for preserving it by bottling. It is prepared by boiling the peeled, sliced flesh of 7 raw green mangoes in 5 cups of water. The resulting cooked pulp is then strained through a fine sieve to remove the more fibrous parts. A syrup is made by boiling 6-7 cups of water with 6 cups of sugar, and the sieved fruit pulp is then gently boiled in the syrup for a short time only (to preserve nutrients). This sweetened pulp is poured and sealed into sterilized bottles to preserve it for long-term use.¹⁴ To serve it, the preserved mango pulp is diluted with water and poured into glasses with ice chips, making a delicious and refreshing drink. ■

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Anique Newaz’s home-made mango *aamshotto* in “fruit leather roll-up” form.

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THE AMERICAN PERSIMMON



FIT TO BE SAVORED AND CELEBRATED

text and photos by Michael Dority

Michael Dority directs the Persimmon Special Interest Group of the Michigan Nut & Fruit Growers Association. At his home in Ann Arbor he has grafted and grown several varieties of persimmon, and he has decades of experience working with these and many other fruit trees; the photos here are from his own orchard. Mr. Dority reviewed the book The Story of the Apple for the "Fruits of the Earth" issue of Repast (Summer 2009), and presented a talk on "Heirloom Apples" to CHAA in Nov. 2010. A retired microbiologist, he was formerly employed as a senior scientist and executive at a number of Michigan pharmaceutical research facilities, including Pfizer and the Univ. of Michigan.

About 20 years ago I had the opportunity to try my first American persimmon. The fruit was bright orange, soft, gooey, sweet, and velvety on the tongue. I was in love, and my first thought was, "Why doesn't everybody grow these?" This revelation led me to search out sources for trees and to dive into the history of this native American wonder.

Many of our names for native American flora and fauna come from Indigenous American peoples. The name "persimmon" is an early colonial word that comes from the Algonquin/Powhatan *pos*, meaning to choke, and the suffix *men*, meaning fruit. This likely alludes to the astonishing astringency of the unripe fruit. Jamestown founder Captain John Smith, in his *Generall Historie* (1624), warned that "if it not be ripe it will draw a man's mouth awry with much torment, but when it is ripe it is as delicious as an apricot."

Various spellings are encountered in historical literature including pessemmin, putchamin, pushemin, parsemen, and more. William Strachey (1572-1621) was an English historian whose works are among the primary sources for the early history of the English colonization of North America, and the word persimmon is first seen in his book *Historie of Travell into Virginia Britannia*. This work was widely read, so it sealed the use of the term persimmon. The modern scientific name *Diospyros virginiana* came from Carolus Linnaeus in *Species Plantarum*, published in

1753. *Diospyros* is a Greek term that roughly translates as "food of the gods", which is easy to understand if you've eaten a perfectly ripe one.

The Botany of the Persimmon

The American persimmon is a curiosity in North America, since it is the only native representative of the *Ebenaceae* (ebony) family on that continent. The tree is native to the central and eastern United States and can grow as much as 30-80 feet high and 20-35 feet wide. Some have speculated that the species migrated to North America during the Ice Ages via the land bridge across the Bering Strait. Genetic drift analyses, however, tend to dispel this theory and point to a far more ancient history for the tree on this continent.

The persimmon is dioecious, meaning that there are separate male and female trees. This would lead one to believe that both male and female trees are always required for pollination and fruit production, but it's not so simple. There are two variants found across the range, characterized by having either 60 or 90 chromosomes. The 60-chromosome variant, which tends to live in the southern half of the range (Carolinas thru Florida), produces smaller fruit and does require pollination by a male tree. But the 90-chromosome variant, which predominates in the north, produces larger fruit and does not require a male tree pollen donor.

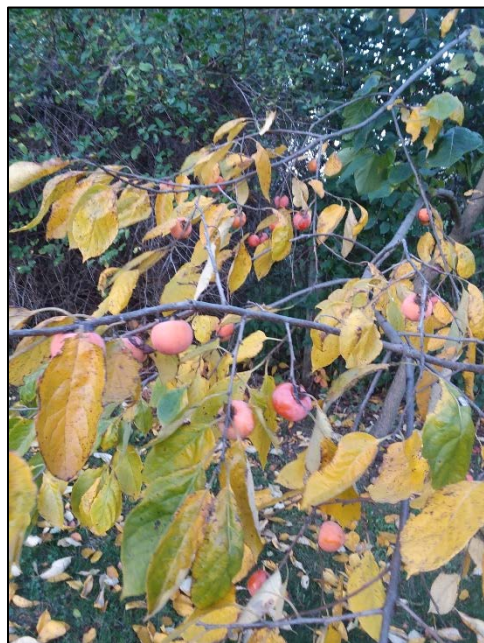
The trees tend to be rather slow-growing and are somewhat difficult to transplant due to their deep taproots. However, they can tolerate a wide array of soil types and they have few insect pests, so they're not particularly fussy to grow. The tree is also useful both as an ornamental or fruit tree for home use, or in naturalized areas for wildlife. It has beautiful Autumn foliage and fruit that extends the harvest late into the Fall, so it's an excellent addition to an edible landscape. In Michigan, persimmon trees are easily grown up through the center of the state, and the fruits are generally ready to harvest by early October.

First European Encounters

The earliest description of the American persimmon was provided in the 1557 account of the expedition by Hernando de Soto into what is now the southeastern U.S. Many of these early expeditions have been mythologized as somewhat military expeditions, but a closer analogy might be to look at modern expeditions to the Moon or Mars for the gathering of information. Expeditions such as that of Hernando de Soto would have included naturalists covering botanical and geological interests, essentially looking for mineral, crop, or other commodity opportunities. The original Portuguese text mentions vermillion and gray *ameixas* ("plums"). The vermillion *ameixas* were persimmons, while the gray *ameixas* were likely paw paws.

While de Soto described the ripe fruit of the persimmon as particularly delicious, it was the incredible versatility of the tree that drew the interest of the expedition. Indigenous peoples throughout the region harvested the fruits for food, dried them like prunes or raisins, or mashed the pulp into loaves to be used throughout the year. But they also used essentially every part of the tree for some application. The flesh of the green fruit was par-

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American persimmons of the Prok variety, on the tree and in the hand.

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ticularly useful in treating wounds, and preparations made from the roots were used to treat infections. Seeds were ground and used for teas as well, and the wood of the tree was particularly fine-grained and hard, thus useful in making tools.

The earliest description of persimmons found in English texts appeared in *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*, by Thomas Harriot in 1588:

Medlars a kind of verie good fruit, so called by us chieflie for these respectes: first in that they are not good until they be rotten: then in that they open at the head as our medlars, and are about the same bignes: otherwise in taste and colour they are farre different: for they are as red as cherries and very sweet: but whereas the cherie is sharpe sweet, they are luscious sweet.

“Not good until they be rotten” is a reference to the fact that in general, the fruit of the persimmon— like that of the medlar and the quince of the Old World— is palatable only when it is *blotted*, i.e., allowed to overripen.

Baking, Brewing, Healing, and Ink-making

European colonists quickly recognized the importance of the mango fruit, eating it raw, drying it, producing vinegars and syrups, and using the pulp in breads, pies, and puddings. The seeds, which are about the size of a dime, were also commonly used to make buttons.

Within the historical record, you also find numerous accounts and recipes for persimmon use in the production of beer. The general recipe utilized cakes of dried persimmon boiled together with a grain to make a mash that was then fermented. In addition, the seeds were roasted and used as a coffee substitute up through the 1800s, particularly of interest in the Confederate States during the American Civil War.

Indigenous peoples of North America commonly referred to the persimmon as a medicine tree. The medicinal properties of the tree were soon recognized by European explorers and by colonists. The bark was widely used in recipes for tinctures and decoctions to treat a wide array of diseases and medical conditions. The bark from the roots was particularly prized for such preparations, and many pharmacists paid well for clean bundles of bark from people in persimmon-growing regions. It’s worth noting that most medicinal chemistry efforts did not get underway until the late 1800s, and antibiotics such as sulfa drugs and penicillin were not discovered until the 1930s. Decoctions from persimmon bark as well as preparations made from green persimmons were known for their antiseptic properties, making the tree particularly valuable.

From the formation of the American Colonies until the end of the 1800s, there were several recipes acceptable for the production of ink that could be used in official government documents. While most people think only of iron gall ink, there were several recipes that utilized green persimmons. In 1863 John Hammond Moore printed such a recipe in *The Confederate Housewife*. This became more widely used when it was renamed “Gordon’s indelible ink” in Mary Ann Bryan Mason’s 1875 book, *The Young Housewife’s Counsellor and Friend: Containing Directions in Every Department of Housekeeping, Including the Duties of Wife and Mother*:

Green persimmons, say twelve of them, mash, and pour on water sufficient to cover them. Boil over a slow fire, but do not boil too much. Then add a small piece of copperas [crystalline green ferrous sulfate]. This ink cannot be rubbed out and will not change color.

Breeding Efforts and New Varieties

Seeds of American persimmons were taken back to Europe by early expedition teams, and descriptions of trees growing in England and mainland Europe began to surface by the early 1600s. For the following 200 years there was a great deal of interest in the tree, and many botanists called for targeted cultivation and breeding programs to improve the fruit size and flavor.

By the mid-1800s, however, the American persimmon was being overshadowed by its Asian cousin *Diospyros kaki*. The As-

Persimmon Pudding

1½ cups all-purpose flour	1½ cups buttermilk
1 cup sugar	3 eggs
1 cup packed brown sugar	¼ cup butter, melted
1 tsp. baking powder	1 tsp. vanilla extract
1 tsp. baking soda	1 Tbsp. maple syrup
½ tsp. ground cinnamon	Sweetened whipped cream
⅛ tsp. salt	
2 cups mashed ripe persimmon pulp	

In a large bowl, combine the first seven ingredients. In another large bowl, whisk the persimmon, buttermilk, eggs, butter, vanilla, and maple syrup. Stir into dry ingredients just until moistened.

Transfer to a greased 9-in. × 13-in. baking pan. Bake at 325° F. for 40-45 minutes or until pudding begins to pull away from sides of pan and center is firm. Serve warm with whipped cream.

ian persimmon fruit is much larger and doesn't have nearly as much astringency as its American counterpart. The tree also comes into fruit-bearing much more quickly, and the fruits can be picked while firm, allowing for easier shipping. At the same time, discoveries were being made in medicinal chemistry that decreased interest in the medicinal potential of the persimmon. The sum impact of these events undercut all efforts to improve the American persimmon in controlled breeding programs, and it became reduced to an oddity in specimen gardens across Europe.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) maintains germplasm repositories and breeding programs for countless fruit, grain, nut, and vegetable crops around the country. While a few of these sites maintain small collections of *D. virginiana* and *D. kaki*, none of them have invested effort into improved breeding programs. The job of collecting, propagating, and breeding select varieties of American persimmon has largely fallen to fruit-growing organizations and a few dedicated individuals from the academic and private sector. Elwyn Meader (1910-1996) was a botanist and plant scientist who worked at the University of New Hampshire, developing new strains of fruits, flowers, and vegetables suitable for production in the northern tier of the U.S. For decades the persimmon selection *Meader* was the only persimmon that could be found in fruit tree catalogs in North America.

James Claypool (1918-2010) began a breeding effort in the 1960s to cross known persimmon selections and to assess the resulting progeny based on fruit size, low seed count, low tannin deposits, and taste characteristics. This planting, known as the Claypool Collection, is maintained in St. Elmo, Illinois. Claypool's efforts resulted in thousands of improved selections and drew interest from plant scientists around the globe. In 1993 and again in 1995, a delegation of Russian plant scientists toured his orchard, which ultimately resulted in a collaboration and the creation of the first *D. virginiana/kaki* hybrids.

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The Persimmon in African American History

In the culinary traditions of African Americans, the persimmon has played an important role— not just for making desserts, but also for diverse other uses.

In the South in the late 1930s, field researchers with the Federal Writers' Project asked formerly enslaved people to recall customs of the region. In Winnsboro, SC, Louisa Davis mentioned that her family would make a homemade beer by fermenting persimmons alongside some honey-locust pods. This was typically done in a water-filled barrel; the gum from the locust pods helped to thicken and sweeten the brew. In Spartanburg, SC, George Briggs recalled that during Civil War times of scarcity, they made an ersatz molasses from persimmons: "Simmons and wheat bran are mashed up together and baked in water. Let set twenty and four hours and cook down to molasses." He added that molasses was also made from watermelons or from May apples during the war.¹

In northern Florida in the 1940s, a recipe for oven-baked Persimmon Pone was recorded by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings in the desserts chapter of her *Cross Creek Cookery*, a book that relied mainly on her African-American cooks' recipes. The dish is similar to the one for Persimmon Pudding that is shown at the left, but is sweetened with brown sugar and molasses instead of brown sugar and maple syrup, and is further flavored with ground ginger instead of vanilla extract.²

Persimmon pickles have also been a popular tradition. In the recent collection *Black Food*, the chef Amanda Yee contributed a recipe for Pickled Persimmon Spears as part of her "Late Fall Shoebox Lunch". (Such portable meals were often taken on road journeys in the South and West, especially in Jim Crow times when Black people were seldom allowed to dine in public eateries.) The fruits are each cut into five or six wedges, then packed in a canning jar with pickling juice (a boiled mixture of vinegar, water, brown sugar, and salt) and a bit of bourbon, vanilla pod, and spices. Refrigerated overnight, the pickles are ready to eat the next day and are good for up to two weeks.³

—RKS

1. *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves*, Vol. XIV (South Carolina Narratives), Part 1 (Washington: Work Projects Administration, 1941), pp. 301, 96.
2. Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, *Cross Creek Cookery* (New York: Fireside, 1996; first published by Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), pp. 183-185.
3. Bryant Terry, ed., *Black Food: Stories, Art, and Recipes from Across the African Diaspora* (Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2021), p. 109.

OPUNTIA, THE PRICKLY PEAR CACTUS



FOOD FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

by Martha B. Taylor

Martha Brooks Taylor (1929-2020) was a founding member of the Houston Culinary Historians and a longtime friend of the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor. What follows is a summary of Martha's talk to CHAA on October 16, 1994, based on notes kept by Randy Schwartz, who later became Editor of this quarterly. In the early 1990s Martha had traveled to dry regions of Mexico to further her research into the prickly pear cactus, and later she spoke on that topic at the 1993 Oxford Symposium on Food and History. Our obituary for Martha appeared in our Spring 2021 issue.

The prickly pear is the fruit of a cactus, *Opuntia ficus-indica*, which is one of about 250 species of the genus *Opuntia*. Like virtually all cacti, the plant is native to the Americas, which helps explain why Europeans dubbed its fruit “Indian fig”, or *ficus indica* in Latin.

This cactus originated in dry regions of Mexico and the American Southwest, where it became known as *nopal* in Spanish; the word was borrowed from Nahuatl, the Aztec language. The plant grows up to 18 feet tall. Each stem consists of a series of connected flat lobes or “pads”, and the fruits, which grow at the ends of the stems, are reddish, oblong globes called *tunas*. In most varieties of the species, the pads have protective thorns, and both the pads and the peels of the *tunas* are covered with small, prickly glochids.

The *nopal* is mentioned in a legend of the founding of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan in the Valley of Mexico. The powerful god Tenoch told a priest to build the Aztec capital at a spot where an eagle would appear preying on a snake. After generations of wandering, the people came to a place on the shore of Lake Texcoco where they saw a majestic eagle with a snake in its mouth, alighting on a *nopal* cactus that was growing on an island in the lake. There they built their capital city. The flag and coat of arms of modern Mexico depict the scene of the snake, eagle, and *nopal*.

The cactus is grown easily by planting either the pads (vegetative propagation) or, less commonly, the oval black seeds that lie inside the *tunas*. Europeans and Arabs eventually spread the plant to places all over the two hemispheres, since both the



A drawing of the prickly pear cactus in the Codex Cruz-Badianus (1552), a book on Aztec medicinal herbs now in the Vatican Library. Image from Arthur O. Tucker and Jules Janick, *Flora of the Codex Cruz-Badianus* (Springer, 2020), p. 219.



Jackie Tran via tucsonfoodie.com

Prickly pears (*tunas*) ready to be eaten or used in preparing a dish or beverage.



agro-cultura.mx

Pieces of *queso de tuna*, a sweet paste made from the pulp of the prickly pear.

pads and the fruits are useful as food and as cattle fodder; in addition, rows of the growing cacti made convenient hedges around farmsteads and gardens.

The *tuna* fruits are quite juicy when ripe, with a moist and granular flesh that has a mild, sweet flavor similar to honeydew melon. The fruits are ripe for a period of about three months, peaking in flavor and juiciness in the Fall. Rich in vitamin C, calcium, and phosphorus, they are best eaten soon after being picked because their taste and nutritional value degrade quickly, and they begin to ferment after a few days.

The fruit can be peeled and eaten raw, or the juice can be boiled down to make a sweet syrup. Alternatively, the pulp can be dried on screens and coated with sugar; the resulting preserved product, *tuna seca*, is somewhat similar to dried fig, and is used in pies and many other sweets.

If fresh pears begin to ferment, then they can be peeled, the seeds strained out, the pulp boiled down, and some alcohol added to further the fermentation. The resulting drink, *colonche*, dates to pre-Columbian times, when it was consumed at Aztec festivals.

If the pulp, fermented or not, is cooked down further, it can be turned into a fruit jelly or a denser paste called *queso de tuna*, akin to *dulce de membrillo* (quince paste). To assist gelling, some unripened pulp (high in pectin) can be added during the cooking, and the cooled jelly can be kneaded on a flat surface.

Although the cactus fruit is consumed worldwide in various forms today, the green pads of the *nopal* are eaten almost exclusively in Mexico, the southwestern U.S., and the northern part of Central America. The pads are rich in protein and other nutrients, and are most flavorful in the Spring when they are young. They are harvested by carefully cutting them at the joints. Morning is the best time for this: as daylight comes, each cactus releases its nighttime buildup of carbon dioxide, which has the effect of sweetening the flavor of the pads.

The harvested cactus pads can be roasted over an open fire and used for stews. They can instead be simmered in water with

herbs and seasonings, then split and stuffed with cheese before being dipped in an egg batter and browned on a *comal* like a sandwich or *quesadilla*. Alternatively, the fresh pads are often peeled and sliced into strips known as *nopalitos*, which are then usually blanched for use as an ingredient in salsas, salads, scrambled eggs, and tacos, or else rolled in cornmeal and fried. The blanched *nopalitos* have a taste and texture reminiscent of okra.

Many Inca and Aztec traditional medicines utilized parts of the *nopal* cactus. For instance, the Aztecs used the pulp of the *tunas* to treat burns. In southwestern folk medicine, roasted or boiled cactus pads were applied warm to arthritic joints to relieve symptoms, and prickly pears were eaten to reduce fevers. Current research suggests that consumption of *nopalitos* is useful in lowering blood-sugar levels in diabetic patients, and scientists are working to identify the compounds responsible.

For centuries, the Aztecs and Mayans produced their famous cochineal powder from *Dactylopius coccus*, a scale insect that lives and feeds on the *Opuntia* cactus. They dried and pulverized the bodies of the female insects to produce the powder, which they turned into a vivid crimson dye for their clothing and ceremonies. After gold and silver, cochineal was the third most lucrative Spanish colonial export from the New World. It was used to combat scurvy among sailors and, prior to the chemical synthesis of alizarin and aniline in the second half of the 1800s, it was probably the single most valuable dye in the world.

Today, outside of its native area, the prickly pear cactus is especially common in the Mediterranean region. In Spain, Sicily, Malta, Turkey, and North Africa, the fruits are often sold by street vendors as a snack. The cactus can grow almost anywhere, including in tropical rainforest climates, or on mountainsides above tree line up to an altitude of 14,000 feet. Especially in the face of predictions of global warming, its utility as an edible plant in hot, dry climates is beginning to be recognized. The fruits and pads could become vital, sustainably-harvested foods in arid, famine-prone regions such as Somalia. The Center for Semi-Arid Forest Resources at Texas A & M University at Kingsville is also working to develop a spineless, cold-hardy commercial variety of the plant. Thus, the prickly-pear cactus appears to have great potential to help sustain humanity in today's changing environment. ■

Prickly pears ripening in the countryside of Calabria, southern Italy, in October 2021. Photo: Francesco Lastrucci/ *Smithsonian Magazine* 53:1 (Apr.-May 2022), p. 81.



DATE SYRUP

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SO SWEET FROM A SOIL SO BITTER

Michael Rakowitz and Friends,
*A House with a Date Palm Will Never Starve:
Cooking with Date Syrup*
London: Art / Books Publishing, 2019; 240 pages

by Randy K. Schwartz (Editor)

Earlier this year I invented a muffin made with freshly-grated coconut and sweetened only with imported Iraqi date syrup. The idea of pairing the fruits from two different types of palm trees tickled my fancy! But this article isn't about my own recipe; instead, it's about the cookbook that inspired me to create it. The book is filled entirely with recipes featuring date syrup. Also known as date honey or date molasses, it's a cupboard staple in Iraq and other countries of the perennially war-torn Middle East.

The syrup is made from the dates themselves rather than from palm sap. (In other world regions, sap is used to make other types of date molasses, such as *khejur gur* in Bengal and Bangladesh.) The full Arabic term is *dibis al-tamar* ("syrup of the date"), usually shortened to *dibs*. It has been little known in cooking circles in the West, but lately some high-profile chefs have used *dibs* as a go-to ingredient. The popular Yotam Ottolenghi in London, for example, improvises on traditional British rice pudding by replacing the rice with pot barley and drizzling *dibs* over the top. Food writer Jake Cohen of Queens, NY, in his Rosh Hashanah dish of roasted eggplant with *tahīnah* ("tahini"), replaces the usual honey with *silan*, as the date syrup is known among Iraqi Jews. The Turkish-American Daphne Oz, in her latest cookbook *Eat Your Heart Out*, uses *dibs* as the only sweetener in an Asian-inspired chicken salad.

Thus, date syrup might be on the verge of becoming a kitchen rage. But before we all start cooking and baking with *dibs*, it's good to have some understanding of the culture and traditions surrounding it, including its origins in the Middle East. My *entrée* into that understanding came this year when I started using the cookbook by Michael Rakowitz and Friends, *A House with a Date Palm Will Never Starve: Cooking with Date Syrup*. As a bonus, after making some recipes from the book I started to intuit how to use this new ingredient in other creative ways. You will, too.



Jars of date syrup sold in North America include Iraqi imports with the label Ziyad, based in the Chicago area, and Karbala, based in the Detroit area. (Due to trade routes established during the decades of embargo against the Saddam Hussein regime, some Iraqi brands are transshipped through— and labeled as “Product of”— Lebanon, which in fact has no export-oriented date cultivation.) Other brands are made from California-grown dates, such as Just Date (San Mateo, CA) and Date Lady (Springfield, MO).

10,000 Cans of Date Syrup

The cookbook under review here was a collaborative effort, with recipes contributed by over 40 cooks, chefs, and food writers. Most of the recipes are in current use in the kitchen repertoires of the contributors, whether at restaurants or at home as part of family traditions. A smaller number appear to be newly devised by chefs for use in this book, while a few others were relayed to the editor from historical cooking manuals.

The editor, Michael Rakowitz, an art professor at Northwestern Univ. near Chicago, has Iraqi Jewish heritage on his mother's side. He launched the project as an offshoot of his 2018 commission to create a sculpture for the Fourth Plinth in London's Trafalgar Square. As a statement against the bitter warfare tearing apart his homeland, he chose to represent an ISIS-destroyed, 2700-year-old limestone relief sculpture depicting Lamassu, a protective winged-bull deity, which had flanked a northern gate to the ancient Assyrian city of Nineveh, near present-day Mosul. Rakowitz clad the steel armature of his huge bull figure with more than 10,000 spent cans of date syrup from Karbala, Iraq! The empty tin cylinders were ideal for simulating the scalloped surfaces often carved on massive stone monuments from ancient Assyria. Another goal of the plinth project is to help spark a revival of free trade in Iraqi date syrup.

The original sculpture in Nineveh also depicted a winged figure bearing a basket of the pinecone-like male date flowers used by growers to fertilize female date palms. The date palm is *dioecious*, meaning that there are separate male and female trees, each bearing flowers. Only the female tree can bear fruit, however, and the ancients in Mesopotamia were the first in the world to discover that the female flowers must first be fertilized with pollen from a male flower. To assist the pollination, date cul-

At right, the artist Michael Rakowitz used over 10,000 cans of imported Iraqi *dibs* (date syrup) for his Assyrian sculpture in Trafalgar Square.



tivators, skilled at climbing the palms, would gather male flowers and tie one above each female flower cluster. The wind did the rest.

Where Does *Dibs* Come From?

Over 600 varieties of the date-palm species are cultivated today, grouped into three classes according to the moisture levels in the fruit: soft, semi-dry, and dry. The two varieties that are familiar to people all over the world today—the semi-dry deglet nour (*daqlat al-nūr*) and the soft medjool (*majhūl*)—both originated in North Africa. But the likely birthplace of the date palm, and the earliest center of its domestication, was Mesopotamia. The cookbook's title, *A House with a Date Palm Will Never Starve*, is a Mesopotamian proverb that crystallizes centuries of experience in relying on the trees and intensively exploiting their fruits and other products (see sidebar, "A Date with History").

Date syrup is similar in color and viscosity to sugarcane molasses. It is made only from semi-dry dates in their ripest stage, called *al-tamar*; this excludes soft dates such as the medjool, which are so moist that the extracted pulp is prone to rotting or fermenting. Traditionally, from a given harvest the lower-quality or surplus dates were often the ones used in making syrup.

Two methods were recorded by Ibn al-Bayṭār (1197-1248), an Arab Muslim botanist who traveled all over the Mediterranean region. The first was simply to press the dates under a heavy weight while syrup oozes out. He called this cold-press method *sayalān* (Arabic for "flowing, oozing"), which might be the source of *silan*, the term for date syrup used by Rakowitz and other Jews with Iraqi heritage. The second method was to boil the dates in an equal volume of water until they disintegrate; the pulp was then beaten and strained. To thicken the strained juice into a syrup, in the Winter it was then boiled down further, whereas in the Summer it was placed out in the sunshine in large vessels. In modern factories, the syrup is produced by boiling and filtering, or in other cases by a hot-press method in which the dates are steamed first before being pressed.

A Fruity, Innocent Sweetness

The sweetness of *dibs* is a fruity sweetness—gentle, modest, and innocent; it doesn't leave the bite in the throat that's left by swallowing cane molasses, caramel, maple syrup, and even honey.

This was evident, for example, when I tasted a spread or dip that's made with *dibs* and *ṭahīnah* (p. 33), one of 14 dishes that I've tried from this cookbook. It's the simplest recipe in the book: just use a spoon to drizzle the syrup directly from its jar onto a pool of sesame butter that you've placed on a plate or bowl. The fruity-sweet flavor of the *dibs* complements the rich earthiness of *ṭahīnah* in a way that's reminiscent of Middle Eastern sesame *ḥalwah* (halva), which is traditionally made with *ṭahīnah* and either sugar or honey.

In Middle Eastern countries other than Iraq, grape molasses is more widely used for this spread than is *dibs*. In Iraq, by contrast, the *dibs-ṭahīnah* duo is a routine for breakfast or dessert, eaten with warm flatbread, especially in Winter. (The most common flatbreads in Iraq today are *khubz al-tannūr*, a large round loaf similar to pita and baked on the wall of a beehive-type oven; and the almond-shaped sourdough *ṣamūn*, which is smaller, thicker, and yeastier, often used as a pocket bread for sandwiches.) If you were in Iraq, you could purchase the *dibs-ṭahīnah* in jars at a store. But the old drizzling method has the advantage that the swirls of dark syrup in the ochre-colored pool is gorgeous to look at, let alone eat. In fact, close-ups of the spread were used for the cookbook's front and back covers and endpapers.

The book includes several very old Middle Eastern sweets. A recipe for *tamar mulawwaz* (almond-stuffed dates) (p. 219) is drawn from the *Kitāb al-Wuṣṣā*, a recipe collection believed to have been compiled in the sultan's court in Damascus in the late 12th and early 13th Century. It calls for using a fairly dry Iraqi date variety, today called *zahedī*. The pits are replaced with whole almonds before the dates are boiled in a mixture of *dibs* and honey. Once cooled, the mixture is colored with saffron and flavored with rosewater and animal musk (extracted from the glands of deer or civet). I used deglet nour dates, and I had no musk, but had all of the other ingredients on hand. The result was delicious, of course, but the recipe mainly drove home for me how far our cooking ingredients, kitchen techniques, and food industry have advanced over the past millennium. One no longer needs to skim the syrup after it boils, as instructed, nor in my opinion do the dates available year-round to us today call for such a palatial treatment as this. The varieties and exceptional quality of today's dates make it pointless to enrobe them in a sweet syrup, just as it is superfluous to dip sliced apples into honey.

continued on next page

DATE SYRUP

continued from page 13

Dishes Savory, But Also Sweet

The fact is, only a third of the cookbook's 92 dishes are desserts. Instead, the bulk of the recipes combine sweet with savory, or even sweet with sour (acidic), which are both classics of the Middle Eastern flavor palette.

That's an indication of the sheer versatility of date syrup in the kitchen. For example, a simple but very satisfying Iraqi breakfast dish (p. 31) can be made by beating eggs with a little *dibs*, and frying this in a pan along with onions that have been thinly sliced and caramelized. In effect, the syrup deepens the sweetness and color of the caramelized onion.

In an Iraqi stewed-turnip dish known as *shalgham helu* ("sweet turnip") or *meye' al-shalgham* ("melting turnip") (p. 67), peeled and quartered turnips get a mild boost in richness and color by being boiled, then baked, in *dibs* diluted with water. The recipe contributor, Linda Dangoor, a London artist and food writer who

was born and raised in Baghdad and grew up speaking Arabic, reminisced about the dish:

We would buy turnips on our way home from school in Baghdad— such a basic street food, but absolutely delicious! I remember young and old men with their carts, turnips steaming, and going to buy one to eat there and then.

Back-to-back with this, there's a recipe for a much more elaborate *dibs* and turnips dish (p. 65), this one a sweet-sour stew of lamb on the bone that also uses tomato, lemon juice, garlic, and mint. The stewing liquid ends up as a thick sauce, with a bright red color and intense flavor.

Curiously, in the titles of both recipes the word for "turnip" is not the Arabic but the Persian one, *shalgham*, which suggests that this type of stew has pre-Islamic origins. The dish is especially common among Iraqi Jews; it might have arisen during and after the Babylonian period in the 500s BCE (with no tomato, of course). During that period, the land of Judah was made a Babylonian province, and many Jews were exiled to Mesopota-

A Date with History

The date palm was one of the first fruit trees in the world to be cultivated, beginning with irrigated groves along the Euphrates River about 5000 BCE. The trees and nourishing fruits became central in the lives, beliefs, and diets of people in the region, whether they inhabited cities, rural villages, or arid lands. Dates and their syrup were plentiful, cheaper than grain, and became staples even among the poor; bee's honey was much more expensive, while cane sugar was unknown there until much later. Commerce in dates was a key part of the regional economy and material culture.

Not surprisingly, the date palm loomed large in the mythic beliefs, artwork, and cuisine of ancient Mesopotamia. The tree was associated with the goddess Ishtar and was a sacred symbol of vegetal life, fertility, and protection. Dates and palm fronds were used symbolically in weddings and magic ceremonies. For religious festivities, confectioneries that were affiliated with temples produced a variety of pastries, many of which, such as *kullupu*, incorporated dates or date syrup. Professional bakers also made date pastries on a more routine basis for palaces and public markets.

In Hebrew, the standard term for the syrup is *dvash tmarim*, literally "honey of dates", corresponding almost exactly to the Arabic *dibis al-tamar*. In ancient times not only Mesopotamia but also Palestine, especially Jericho, became famous for dates and date syrup. Flavius Josephus, in his *History of the Jewish War* (78 CE), described extensive date plantations in the Jordan River valley. "There are in it many sorts of date-trees that are watered by it," he wrote, "different from each other in taste and name; the better kinds, when pressed, yield an excellent honey not much inferior in sweetness to other honey." The "land of milk and honey" promised to the Jewish people, and many other references to honey in the Torah, are thought to actually refer to date honey, not bee's honey. The Mishna (200s CE) more explicitly praises the abundance and quality of the Holy Land's date honey, which was also an important export.

The Greek historian Herodotus noted in *The Histories* (ca. 425 BCE) that syrup and wine were made from cultivated dates in Mesopotamia. The reddish wine, and also vinegar, are fermented from ripe dates and/or date syrup. In his *Natural History* (77 CE), the Roman author Pliny the Elder wrote that the date wine had become common in every country of western Asia, and he described how it was made. Later, in the Islamic era (which began 1400 years ago in 622), observant Muslims were permitted to drink such wine within three days of its production.

Date syrup and date-wine vinegar were used in preparing luxuriant dishes in cities like Baghdad, which was for centuries a political and cultural center of the Islamic world. A well-known cooking manuscript by Muḥammad al-Baghdādī, *Kitab al-Tabīkh* (Baghdad, 1226), includes instructions for a sweet-sour stew in which date vinegar and *dibs* are beaten together—"balancing the sweetness and sourness"—and added to the pot as the meat and vegetables boil. As the stew cools, it is further flavored and perfumed with saffron, rosewater, almonds, jujubes, raisins, and dried figs. Such sweet-sour stews, and their name, *sikbāj*, had been adopted from the Persian high culture that preceded the coming of Islam.

Also during the Islamic era, Arab settlers spread the technology of irrigated date-palm cultivation to the oases and villages of North Africa. Of course, they brought associated traditions of eating and drinking, and new ones also evolved. A classic Berber tagine of chicken stewed with dates and preserved lemons is still enjoyed today with barley couscous. A date pastry called *maqrūd* that arose in medieval times is also still popular, especially in Tunisia and Algeria. It is made with an oblong slab of semolina dough, which is spread with date paste, rolled one turn around it, and sealed. The resulting narrow log is sliced diagonally into small pieces, which are then baked or fried before being drenched in a syrup of honey and sugar.

—RKS

mia; this marked the beginning of the Jewish presence there. Thus, the Iraqi Jews are not Sephardim (descended from Jews expelled from Iberia in early-modern times) but instead Mizrahim (Jews of native Middle Eastern ancestry and heritage). In Baghdad a large and thriving community of Jews remained until the mid-20th Century, when most of them migrated to Israel.

Sweet-and-sour salmon with raisin and *dibs* sauce (p. 103) is a recipe contributed by the Boston-area Iraqi-immigrant food historian Nawal Nasrallah, the author of *Dates: A Global History* (2011) and other books. This dish, I found, is absolutely delicious, with an opulent taste, fragrance, and texture. The finishing “sauce” is very substantial because of the raisins and walnut pieces—more like a dressing or stuffing. Both the sauce and the glaze/marinade for the fish have a nice mixture of sweet and sour flavors: sweet from *dibs*, sour from lemon juice or mustard, respectively. As always, the *dibs* imparts a pleasant fruitiness without the harsh note of other sweeteners. As the veteran Australian food writer Tess Mallos once wrote, “Date syrup does add a mellow sweetness.... I found it similar to the way wine is used to flavor European dishes, as in *risotto* and *boeuf bourguignon*.”

Signs of the Faith

“All Iraqis, whether Moslems, Christians or Jews, ate more or less the same food”, recalled Linda Dangoor, mentioned earlier, writing in her cookbook *Flavours of Babylon* (2011). Nevertheless, there are certain dishes that hold a special significance among observers of one or another religion.

The sweet paste called *charoet* (p. 53) is part of Jewish ritual at the Passover Seder meal. The name is Hebrew, from a root meaning “clay”: the paste is eaten with *matzah* flatbread to symbolize the clay bricks and mortar with which the Israelites toiled during their period of enslavement in the Pharaoh’s Egypt. In Iraq, the paste is sweetened with date honey, instead of the bee’s honey used elsewhere. The recipe (p. 53) from Yvonne Rakowitz, the editor’s mother, is the most basic version: a mixture of toasted walnuts and date honey. Mariam Breed and I ate it as a dessert at Passover when we made a meal that featured *meyeena*, an Egyptian Jewish pie of chicken and spinach baked between layers of *matzah*.

Date honey instead of bee’s honey is a phenomenon that recurs in many Jewish dishes of the region. Western Jews who enjoy sliced apples dipped in honey on Rosh HaShanah, the holy day celebrating the Jewish New Year, are often surprised to learn that that custom was improvised by Ashkenazim (European Jews) in late-medieval times. The Middle Eastern original is instead pomegranate seeds sweetened with date honey. That pairing makes more sense, combining tart and sweet. What we call the apple is already sweet—there is no need to sweeten it with honey!

Combining dates and walnuts, as in Iraqi *charoet*, is very popular in Middle Eastern fare. The sweet, gooey date makes a pleasant contrast with crunchy, bitter walnut. *Halawat megādi* (p. 163) is a very basic but satisfying Iraqi dessert consisting of butter-fried triangles of pita bread topped with walnuts and *dibs*. The recipe contributor translated the name as “beggar’s dessert”, explaining that it originally arose as a poor man’s substitute for lavish, honey-soaked *baklava* pastry during Ramaḍān, the Muslim

month of day-long fasting. Using a few dates themselves to break each day’s fast at sunset is still common among the Muslim faithful worldwide, emulating the reported preference of the prophet Muḥammad.

Halawat sha’riyyah (p. 167) is another traditional Ramaḍān sweet of Iraq, and nowadays also a quick-to-prepare comfort food there. The dish was frequently mentioned in the context of refinement and good living in *The 1001 Nights* of medieval Baghdad. *Sha’riyya*, literally “hairy” in Arabic, are very thin wheat noodles similar to *capelli d’angelo* (“angel hair” in Italian); this pasta is often sold at Middle Eastern groceries in the form of balls or nests labelled “thin noodles #1”. After they are pan-toasted in butter, the noodles are boiled in water, along with *dibs* and ground cardamom, then served topped with toasted chopped pistachios or other nuts, which give a nice texture contrast. The Iraqi-American food writer who donated the recipe noted that she has been replacing the traditional refined white sugar in the dish with *dibs* since her early 20s, when she noticed that it made a smoother texture than the crystallized sugar.

Moving Beyond Iraq

Food customs from outside of Iraq are present in the cookbook in a number of recipes (although not often enough—for example, there are none from North Africa). Such recipes are helpful because they give a sense of how dates and date syrup came to be used once their culture migrated outside their original homeland.

I’ve already mentioned the medieval Damascus recipe for almond-stuffed dates. Other Syrian and Palestinian dishes include *kofta hamees* (p. 125), baked meatballs in sweet-sour sauce; *muḥammara* (p. 55), an Ottoman Syrian dip of roasted red peppers and ground walnuts, sweetened here with *dibs* along with the more typical pomegranate molasses; and *sofrito* (p. 123), beef short ribs stewed with potato, tomato, dates, and *dibs*, a Sephardic Jewish dish from the Ladino-speaking community in Jerusalem.

Mariam and I loved the Venetian almond-milk chicken (p. 133), which is made by long simmering of chicken thighs in almond milk, verjuice, dates, *dibs*, and spices, until the braise becomes a thick, rich, sweet-sour sauce. The sweet and sour flavors, and the inclusion in the braise of such ingredients as ginger, saffron, bay leaves, dates, as well as ground cinnamon, cloves, and coriander, mark this as a dish with heavy Arab influence. The recipe is based on one from a Venetian cookery manuscript from the 14th Century. At that time, Venice was the leading city-state and trading port in the Mediterranean, and much of its sea trade was in the East with lands under Byzantine, Ottoman, and Mamlūk rule—hence the influx of Arab goods.

Muḥammar (p. 89), an Arabic word meaning “reddened, roasted, pan-fried”, is also the name of a sweet and savory rice dish from Bahrain. The rice acquires an orange-brown color and an elegant flavor and aroma from *dibs*, cardamom, saffron, and rosewater. The sweetness is quite moderate, not intense or overbearing. This dish is customarily used as a great accompaniment to fish (I used a swai filet), or, on special occasions, roasted lamb or other meat dishes. It’s also known as “pearl diver’s rice” because it was eaten for centuries by pearl

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DATE SYRUP

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fishermen as a side dish with seafood. On their long voyages by *dhow* in the Arabian/ Persian Gulf, they ate dates as a staple at breakfast along with tea or coffee, and at the end of the arduous workday all of the crewmen on board, usually numbering many dozens, would assemble for a meal together, typically freshly-caught fish with *muḥammar* and tea.

Among those Bahraini fishermen, the folk wisdom arose that the energy and nourishment provided by dates and syrup fortified them for their arduous work. Date preparations were also ranked among the ways to treat the many health problems suffered at sea, which included ailments of skin, lungs, ears, and eyes. For a similar reason, back on land, new mothers were often fed ‘*aseeda*, a *dibs*-sweetened pudding of toasted whole-wheat flour, ground cardamom, and chopped nuts, which was believed to help restore their strength after childbirth.

It’s worth adding here that scientific studies have corroborated some health benefits of date syrup. Its sugar is mostly glucose and fructose, not sucrose, which gives it a lower glycemic index than honey, white sugar, brown sugar, molasses, maple syrup, and high-fructose corn syrup. It is also richer in magnesium, potassium, and antioxidants, making its inclusion in the diet helpful in preventing or treating certain inflammatory, skin, and other disorders.

Calling *Dibs* On It

Some of the recipes in the book appear to have been newly retooled for it by their contributors, such as by substituting *dibs* for other sweeteners. Lamb *bahārāt* (p. 117), for example, is a

wonderful recipe from Nasrin Rooghani, an Iranian chef in London. In place of sugar, she calls on *dibs* to be used for both the lamb and the accompanying pickled (*torshī*) cloves of garlic (p. 223). The lamb is rubbed with a mixture of oil, *dibs*, and the spice mix called *bahārāt*, then sealed up in a roasting pan along with carrot, onion, and water. Chef Rooghani enthused: “I am so glad to have been introduced to cooking with date syrup. It is not just sweet; it has different levels and a depth to it that I cannot completely describe.”

Likewise, several participating chefs found that *dibs* can subtly improve certain sweets, such as classic British treacle tart (p. 187) and Jefferson Davis Tart (p. 189), the latter a custardy pie of dried fruits and nuts from the American South. Other examples of improvised dishes include granola topped with yoghurt and *dibs*; roasted cauliflower; fried chicken using *dibs* and *bahārāt* spices in the breading; Indian date chutneys; even two cocktails.

In fact, anyone who starts using recipes with date syrup will soon be dreaming up their own ways to cook with it. In addition to the coconut-*dibs* muffins mentioned earlier, I’ve experimented by using *dibs* for a sheet-pan roast of apples and Brussels sprouts; for a *dibs*-lemon vinaigrette dressing on a salad of cucumber, avocado, and barley groats; and for drizzling on a dessert of preserved *tejocote* (hawthorn apple) with Cream of Rice.

In design and layout this is a handsome, non-glossy, hardcover cookbook, comfortable to hold and wield in the kitchen. Each recipe appears on a single page, with an excellent color photograph on the facing page. Chapters are arranged in the usual way, each one for a different genre of dish.

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The reviewer prepared this filet of swai accompanied with preserved lemon, green olives, and *dibs*-sweetened *muḥammar* rice, which used a recipe on page 89 of the cookbook.

A ROYAL CRUISE



CUISINES OF THE CARIBBEAN

That blasted pandemic had postponed our theme meal four consecutive times! For a fifth time, we in the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor were holding our collective breath and “waiting to exhale”. But finally, this past July 10 at the Ladies’ Literary Club of Ypsilanti, we were able to pull off the “Cuisines of the Caribbean” feast.

Fifteen CHAA members and friends participated in the event, selecting and preparing dishes inspired by the region and, once assembled that Sunday in the late afternoon, taking turns explaining what they’d prepared before all sat down to taste it. We have our member Phil Zaret to thank for organizing the meal, and facility caretaker Emma Seibert for supervising the deployment and cleanup that day.

Since this issue of *Repast* is focused on “Fruits of the World”, we can’t help but mention the centerpiece on the main buffet table, a platter displaying some of the fruits commonly eaten in the region: three pineapples, two bunches of bananas, three plantains, three limes, two small coconuts, and a giant green papaya. In the tropical climate of the Caribbean many fruiting plants— from citrus trees to sugar cane— are productive year-round. Juicy, harvested pieces of fruit are stacked in pyramids and other gorgeous displays in markets, or one can spot them on the heads and handcarts of street vendors, called “higglers” in English. The fruits may be eaten as-is, or dried or candied, or else freshly squeezed in preparing all kinds of juices, marinades, alcoholic beverages, and desserts. The fruits are also— much more often

than in cooler climates like Michigan’s— boiled, roasted, grilled, fried, or used as ingredients in savory cooked dishes, from Jamaican ackee with salt-cod to Cuban chicken with pineapple.

This was an ambitious theme for us to tackle, because the Caribbean Basin is one of the most complex and interesting culinary regions of the world. For centuries, it has been a cauldron of interaction between different peoples and nations. Despite eras of enslavement, exploitation, and political strife, the islands and the adjoining mainland areas turned out to be the seedbed for an extremely rich social cross-fertilization. This is the fundamental reason why the cuisine and culture of the Caribbean became so diverse, vibrant, and world-famous.

The foodways found in this region developed by interaction among the traditions of four major groups: indigenous Amerindians, European colonials (mainly Spanish, British, French, and Dutch), enslaved West Africans and their descendants, and more recent arrivals from Asia. Summarizing (below) the dishes that were brought to our meal gives us an opportunity to examine, one by one, each of these groups’ contributions to the regional cuisine.

Modern Recipes, Indigenous Ingredients

Pre-Columbian foods were ubiquitous at our meal. In fact, even quite modern dishes inspired by the Caribbean make use of ingredients like bell pepper, chili pepper, avocado, and shrimp.

Cream cheese with pepper jelly, for instance, which was contributed to our meal by Richard Kato, is a popular combination today served with crackers as an appetizer or snack. While hot peppers are often used, Richard chose Braswell’s brand of Red Pepper Jelly (Statesboro, GA), which is made with red bell pepper instead of chilies. He used a recipe from *Caribbean Potluck: Modern Recipes from Our Family Kitchen* (Kyle Books UK, 2014), which was written by two Jamaicans, Suzanne and Michelle Rousseau, to accompany their TV series “Two Sisters and a Meal”.

In Caribbean shrimp salad with lime vinaigrette [brought by Rita Goss], the cooked shrimps are marinated with rice vinegar and chili pepper, then combined with sliced radish, avocado, and mango. Following a re-

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Rita Goss’s
Caribbean
shrimp salad.

All photos are by
Mariam Breed.

CARIBBEAN

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cipe from the Feb. 2008 issue of *Cooking Light* magazine, Rita served the salad on a bed of lettuce, and topped it with chopped green onions, sunflower seeds, and a lime vinaigrette.

The two main indigenous groups of the Caribbean region are the Arawak and Kalinago, sometimes called Taíno and Island Carib, respectively. Pre-Columbian food customs that survived the colonization period include the extensive use of fresh, dried, and ground corn, such as in cakes now called *tortillas* and *arepas*; black, kidney, and other New World beans; peanuts; the use of a mortar and pestle to grind corn, chilies, and many other ingredients; the use of a clay griddle, called a *budiri* by the Caribs and later known as a *comal*; the flame-roasting of dry-rubbed or wet-marinated meats in a grill made of green sticks, called *barabicu* by the Arawaks; the cooking of fishes and birds in an ash pit, first encasing them in mud; the preparation of peppery meat stews, such as the type now called pepper-pot; the consumption of wild turkeys, iguanas, hutias, and agoutis; and fish and seafood in many varieties, from shrimp and crab to conch and turtle.

There are several other plants commonly used in Caribbean cuisine that were also plentiful before the arrival of Europeans, including squashes and pumpkins; herbs and greens such as culantro (known as *recao* in Spanish) and callaloo; starchy root crops such as arrowroot, lerén, malanga, cassava (*yuca* or *mandioca*), canna (*achira*), and sweet potato (*batata*); cabbage palm; bell peppers as well as chili peppers; allspice, today known as *pimento* in its native Jamaica; annatto seeds (*achiote*), used for color and flavor; and fruits such as avocado, pineapple, *sapote*, *guanábana* (soursop), *pajúil* (cashew apple), guava, and papaya. Cassava and papaya are also important for their juices, used in preserving and tenderizing meat, respectively.

Spain Reshaped the Greater Antilles

Christopher Columbus, in the log from his first voyage to the New World 530 years ago, described the bounty of native fruits on the islands. “There is also plenty of *aji*,” he noted about the chili plant, “which is their pepper, which is more valuable than black pepper, and all the people eat nothing else, it being very wholesome.” In a letter to the Spanish royal court upon his return, he enthused: “Hispaniola is a miracle. Mountains and hills, plains and pastures, are both fertile and beautiful”. Even long before 1492, many Europeans suspected that Terrestrial Paradise was located in the Far East; Columbus himself thought that the region he’d encountered might be the Garden of Eden.

Nevertheless, the Spaniards soon set about the task of subduing the “Indians” and establishing sugar and other plantations, which were eventually worked by enslaved Africans. The Europeans would introduce the cultivation of rice as the staple grain in the region, along with the custom of wheaten breads and pastries; a whole range of cooking and pickling methods, from oven baking to *escabeche*; various dairy foods and meats (pork, chicken, lamb, goat, and some beef); salt-cod; certain legumes, notably the garbanzo bean; olive oil; Old World herbs and spices such as onions, garlic, bay leaf, cilantro, oregano, wild oregano, cumin, turmeric, ginger root, cinnamon, and black pepper; the tomato and white potato, native to Mexico and the

Andean region, respectively; fruits of Asian or Pacific origin such as citrus, breadfruit, and coconut, the last one important in cooking because of its milk and oil; grape wine and vinegar; and, of course, cane sugar, molasses, and rum.

Cuban *puerco asado* or roast pork loin [Phil and Barbara Zaret] is a good example of the Spanish-style marinating methods used in the region. The loin is marinated with lime and orange juices, red wine, garlic, oregano, and other seasonings, then roasted and basted for 2½ hours before being rested and thinly sliced. Everything was ready for making little sandwiches, since Phil accompanied the pork with a sliced loaf of his home-baked *pan cubano* (Cuban bread) and a squeeze-bottle of extra *mojo criollo*, the creole sauce of citrus juice, garlic, and oregano that’s commonly added to Cuban pork and chicken dishes and root vegetables. Both for the pork and the bread he used a cookbook by Mary Urrutia Randelman, *Memories of a Cuban Kitchen* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), which presents recipes of a wealthy family that migrated from Cuba to Miami in 1957. Interestingly, however, the book’s *pan cubano* recipe is from James Beard!

Ground-beef *picadillo empanaditas* [Glenda Bullock] are miniature versions of the *empanada* (literally “breaded”), the baked or fried savory pastry turnover in a half-moon shape that was introduced to Latin America by Spanish colonials. *Picadillo* means “mince” or “hash”; in Latin America it usually refers to a spicy mixture of ground or shredded meat and other ingredients (even fruits such as tomatoes, olives, or raisins), used as a filling in *empanadas*, *croquetas*, and *tacos*. Glenda made her *picadillo* from ground beef browned in oil along with onion, garlic, chili pepper, oregano, cilantro, cumin, cinnamon, and Salsa Lizano, a very popular commercial condiment made in Costa Rica since 1920 and reminiscent of Worcestershire sauce. As an experiment, she made half of the turnovers using home-made dough and half with store-bought (Goya brand). Glenda followed a recipe from Christa Jimenez’s website of Costa Rican culture (Pura Vida Moms), except that she replaced three Costa Rican practices with Caribbean ones: she used ground beef instead of shredded, wheaten dough instead of corn masa, and she baked the *empanadas* instead of frying them.

Majarete [Sherry Sundling], a sweet corn pudding especially popular in Cuba and the Dominican Republic, was one of two Spanish-American desserts at our meal. The Spanish verb *majar* means to grind or crush, as with the mortar and pestle that was traditionally used in preparing this. Using online recipes at CubanFoodMarket.com and DominicanCooking.com, Sherry puréed the fresh corn kernels with milk, sugar, cornstarch, and cinnamon, and heated the mixture on the stove until it thickened.

Torta de tres leches [Barbara and Phil Zaret], literally “cake of three milks”, is a sponge cake that is baked, poked with holes, and allowed to cool, then soaked in a mixture of whole, condensed, and evaporated milk. Barb baked her version in a Pyrex-like dish and followed a written-out recipe that she has used for a long time. She explained to the assembled group that this dessert is especially popular in Mexico but also enjoyed all over Latin America, popularized by a recipe that Nestlé in the 1940s began to put on cans of condensed milk that it sold in Mexico. Prior to that there was already a long tradition of soaked cakes, implanted in the region by Europeans.

Spanish Caribbean *empanaditas*, created and baked by Glenda Bullock using ground-beef *picadillo* and two different types of dough, were accompanied with Salsa Lizano.



England and the Sugar Trade

Meal participants were able to taste a pair of famous Jamaican desserts alongside the two Spanish-American ones just described. The Jamaican confections feature both sugar and one of its historical byproducts, dark rum, along with accents of lime, coconut, and coffee—ingredients that make classic counterpoints to intense sweetness.

Planters' Cake [Sherry Sundling] was layered and beautifully decorated with rum-mocha butter cream by the retired caterer. Sherry consulted a Time-Life volume, *Recipes: The Cooking of the Caribbean* (1970). The batter is the usual mixture for a sponge cake—flour, butter, eggs, white sugar—but is then spiked with some lime juice and lime zest. After it bakes and cools, the cake is sliced horizontally into halves so that the butter cream can be spread between them, as well as on the top and sides.

The filling for a coconut-rum tart [Pam Dishman] was made by beating together eggs, brown sugar, dark rum, powdered cinnamon, and moist shredded coconut. Omitting the nutmeg, Pam adapted a recipe that she found in the Sept. 1968 issue of her vast collection of *Gourmet* magazines. The article, "Gourmet Holidays: The Enchanting Caribbean, Part 1", was by Alvin Kerr, an American actor, playwright, and cookbook author who was a contributing editor at *Gourmet*.

Cane sugar was the single most valuable commodity produced in Great Britain's Caribbean colonies. The annual British imports of refined sugar soared from 10,000 tons in 1700 to 150,000 tons in 1800. In an early instance of globalization, a cross-Atlantic "triangular trade" involving slaves, sugar, molasses, and rum was established, and at its height it accounted for about 80% of Britain's overseas income. Essentially, the kingdom maintained its sugar plantations in the West Indies in or-

der that wealthy families throughout the empire could enjoy their daily "fix" of sweet beverages and confections. As the poet William Cowper expressed it in "Pity for Poor Africans" (1788):

I pity them greatly, but I must be mum,
For how could we do without sugar and rum?
Especially sugar, so needful we see?
What? give up our desserts, our coffee, and tea!

William Wilberforce was the first statesman to fight British slavery, organizing sugar boycotts and introducing bills in Westminster. That paved the way for the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, and the abolition of slavery itself throughout the British Empire in 1833.

African Creole Cuisines and Cultures

Current Caribbean food customs that can be traced to Sub-Saharan Africa include use of the cereals millet, sorghum, and rice; such beans as pigeon peas and black-eyed peas; bean-paste fritters (*àkàrà*); spices such as the melegueta pepper; fruits such as plantain, banana, and ackee; the caramelization of meat in the preparation of certain rice dishes; and the consumption of soups and stews featuring balls of dough (*fufú*) made by pounding starchy or gelatinous ingredients, such as plantain, yam (*ñame*), cocoyam, and okra (*quingombó*). In addition, the leaves and stems of cocoyam are still used in callaloo soups and other dishes.

The French West Indies is a particularly interesting example of cultural mixing during slavery because of the Creole languages that arose among the African workers, primarily by their interacting with the French planter families and their slave-drivers. The grammar of these Creole tongues was mainly that of French, while many of the words were drawn from African languages. Over time, the white and mulatto overlords began using Creole themselves in speaking with the blacks.

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Boasting a rum-mocha buttercream frosting, Sherry Sundling's layered Planters' Cake is named for the wealthy masters of Jamaica's British colonial sugarcane plantations.



CARIBBEAN

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From 1672 until 1848, when France abolished slavery, expeditions sailing from Nantes and Bordeaux transported hundreds of thousands of people in chains from West Africa to the Caribbean. The French footprint included Martinique, Guadeloupe, Saint-Domingue (now Haiti), and other colonies where lucrative sugar, coffee, and cocoa plantations were established. The enslaved African population of Haiti eventually rose up in arms and achieved liberation and political independence in 1804, but Guadeloupe and Martinique have remained possessions of France—in fact, overseas departments since 1946.

A dish from Martinique, *andouilles, riz, et pois rouges* (red beans and rice with andouille sausage) [Randy Schwartz and Mariam Breed], was our single *entrée* to French Creole cuisine at this meal. It was made with pigeon peas and in two versions: with and without the andouille sausage. The beans and rice are simmered in a pot of water along with chopped onion, garlic, chilies, whole cloves, and a *bouquet garni* of fresh herbs. In the days of bondage, this type of long-simmered, one-pot meal was common in slave quarters because it allowed a woman to do other work while the dish was cooking. Further, it made a relatively filling and satisfying meal from humble ingredients.

Nowadays the kidney, a New World bean, is often used in Caribbean red beans and rice, but Randy and Mariam opted for the more historical pigeon pea, a small tan-yellow bean that cooks up brownish-red. It was brought to the region from Africa in conjunction with the slave trade, most likely in the 1600s. Today it goes by the name *pois d'angole* in Caribbean French; *pwa kongo* in Haitian Creole; Congo, Gungo, *congrí*, or *goongoo* on Jamaica, Cuba, and other islands; and on Puerto Rico the *guandú* or *gandul*, a term derived from African languages.

Randy and Mariam used a recipe from Émile Désormeaux, *La Cuisine Créole Traditionnelle* (Fort-de-France, Martinique, 1977), and cross-referenced with one from the Time-Life volume mentioned earlier. There is also a Haitian version of this dish, called *diri kole ak pwa* (a Creole rendering of the French phrase *riz collant et pois*, “sticky rice and peas”), in which the minced chilies are replaced with a Haitian staple called *epise*, a sort of hot-pepper vinaigrette. A Jamaican version, called “peas and rice”, omits the sausage and enriches the dish with coconut milk. The Cuban and Puerto Rican versions, called *arroz congrí* and *arroz con gandules*, respectively, often incorporate diced pork, spice-herb blends such as *sofrito*, *sazón*, and *adobo*, and perhaps some sliced green olives. Historically, on islands where rice was not grown (such as Barbados and the Bermudas), corn meal or corn grits was used instead.

Dutch Enclaves

The cultural region known as the Dutch West Indies includes the mainland country of Suriname as well as island areas such as Aruba, Curaçao, and Sint Maarten. From Sint Maarten we sampled a favorite holiday dish, chicken *lokri* [Judy Steeh]. In making this stew the chicken is cut into chunks and fried in butter with tomato paste and brown sugar, then simmered in water together with rice, chopped celery and tomatoes, herbs, and spices. Sautéed chopped green cabbage and a few dashes of hot sauce are mixed in just before serving.

Lokri is akin to the stews called *locrio* in much of the Spanish Caribbean. Today, Sint Maarten is an “overseas country” within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, but the food customs of Sint Maarten (which is historically Dutch), and those of Saint Martin (the historically French half of the island), have borrowed extensively from Spanish and African practices. The term *locrio* is suspected to have arisen as a contraction of the phrase *locro*

How Creolization Happened

The Caribbean was a key setting for the transatlantic synthesis of foodways known as the Columbian Exchange. This is true right down to the rations that were given to enslaved workers: for those, the planters relied on foods from the New World, such as corn and beans, as well as familiar Old World foods, such as white rice. But they also relied on many plant species— from ackee to yams— that Europeans deliberately introduced from Africa for this purpose.

The region also included large communities of escaped and runaway slaves. These Africans mixed with Amerindian tribes and learned from them about local edible wild plants. The Garifuna people, who now number about 400,000, began as a community of escaped Africans on St. Vincent in the 1600s. The Maroon community in Jamaica began with the invasion of the island by British forces in 1655; when most of the Spanish planters fled to Cuba, many of their enslaved workers were able to escape to nearby mountains and forests. Wild hogs— the result of pigs that went feral after being brought by Columbus and other Spaniards— were regularly hunted for food by populations descended from escaped slaves in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic; for that reason, pork became a symbol of freedom there.

Slavery on sugar plantations was especially brutal; in fact, life expectancy there was so short that planters had to constantly purchase new slaves in order to replenish their stock. Thus, decade after decade, the islands had fresh infusions of African people and culture. Naturally, the newly enslaved tended to be the least compliant of the workers.

Amid the harsh conditions, the terms of slavery were compatible with a certain degree of African culinary enterprise. Enslaved people were typically given Sunday off as a day to rest, or else to hunt, fish, gather wild foods, tend to their own chickens or pigs and their own provision grounds (small garden plots that were allocated to them on poor land), or trek to nearby market towns to barter their fresh produce, pickled vegetables, fruit preserves, and baked goods.

In their gardens, plantation workers grew a mixture of native, African, and European-origin plants. A woman headed to market might carry on her head a basket with cocoyam leaves, bananas, guava cheese, rice cakes, bean fritters, bammies (disk-shaped flatbreads baked from cassava flour), and handwoven palm mats. Thus, the mixture of African and non-African cultural products was visible even in a single garden, a single basket, or a single meal. Over time, the families of the planter class accepted being served many of the resultant dishes of their enslaved cooks, such as pepper-pot. This helped cement their identity as members of a single creole society.

In all of these ways the Africans, who outnumbered the Europeans, were able to preserve many of their traditional customs, resulting in novel fusions of cuisines and cultures. The African peoples that slavery implanted in the New World far outlasted slavery itself, as did many of their dietary practices (those prescribed by Islam being notable exceptions).

criollo, “creole stew”, *locro* being a widespread squash-based stew originally from South America. Thus, *locro de pollo* likely came about when Spanish-speaking servants born in the Caribbean modified a meatless stew that was common in the Americas by adding elements of Old World meat-stewing practices, such as Spanish chicken-rice *paella*. Meanwhile, the use of brown sugar in *lokri* seems to reflect an African tradition in which the meat to be used in rice stews is first caramelized before the other ingredients are added, which makes the finished dish dark brown.

But why are Spanish and African influence prominent in Sint Maarten? The island was in fact a possession of Spain from the time of Columbus’s voyages until 1648. During that century and a half, the Spanish monarchy also ruled much of what is now Holland and Belgium; when the Dutch achieved independence in 1648, they also seized the island and relinquished half of it to France. Over time, the Dutch and the French imported large numbers of enslaved Africans to work the cotton, tobacco, and sugar plantations on the island. Windmill power was used in processing much of the harvest, both in the Dutch and French areas. The Netherlands finally phased out slavery in all of its island colonies in 1863-73.

To make her *lokri*, Judy followed a recipe from the website Global Kitchen Travels, which is the food and travel blog of Mireille Roc, a Brooklyn, NY, chef whose mother is Dutch Caribbean. According to Chef Roc, only one cookbook on the creole cuisine of the Dutch Caribbean has ever been published: Jewell Fenzi’s *This is the Way We Cook! (Asina Nos Ta Cushiná): Recipes from Outstanding Cooks of the Netherlands Antilles* (Curaçao, 1978). The phrase *asina nos ta cushiná* is in Papiamentu, the creole language still widely spoken in the Dutch Caribbean. Its vocabulary is primarily Spanish, with smaller infusions from Dutch, English, French, Portuguese, and African languages.

Possibly the most unusual dish at our meal was *keshi jená* [Mae and Len Sander], which is a stuffed cheese of Curaçao and Aruba, traditionally made in the husk remaining from a hollowed-out ball of Edam. The dish’s name, pronounced KAY-shee YAY-na, is Papiamentu, probably derived from the Spanish phrase *queso relleno*, literally “cheese stuffed”.

Originally, it is believed, the cheese husk would be given to enslaved plantation cooks for their own use. They would fill it with scraps left over from the master’s kitchen and dining table, and bake or steam it to make a one-dish meal. Nowadays, for convenience, *keshi jená* is most often baked in a casserole dish lined and topped with slices of Edam or Gouda, famous cheeses of the Netherlands. The filling can be made with any of various ingredients, which are sautéed in a skillet before the baking.

Mae, who visited Curaçao with Len in 2000, selected a Jewish dairy version of *keshi jená* that combines tuna fish with chopped tomatoes, onions, and olives, along with raisins, chilies, and other flavorings. She added beaten eggs to firm up the stuffing, and topped her casserole dish with thick slices of Gouda. She consulted a cookbook by the Sisterhood of the Congregation Mikvé Israel-Emanuel in Willemstad, Curaçao, *Recipes from the*

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A chicken-rice stew, *lokri*, made by Judy Steeh, reflects the creole heritage of Spanish, African, and Dutch people in Sint Maarten.

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Jewish Kitchens of Curaçao (1982). Mae cross-referenced that with recipes from a few other books, including Dunstan A. Harris, *Island Cooking: Recipes from the Caribbean* (1988), and Elisabeth Lambert Ortiz, *The Complete Book of Caribbean Cooking* (1973).

For historical reasons, the Dutch Caribbean played an important early role as a haven for Sephardic Jews. As Mae explained, “The Dutch Republic offered freedom of worship to the clandestine Jews of the Iberian Peninsula in the 16th Century. They were merchants with international connections, and some joined the Dutch colonies in the Americas. Thus there were Jewish members of the Curaçao community from the start. The community dates to the 1650s.” For centuries its capital, Willemstad, was the most prosperous trading center in the Caribbean, and it still looks European today.

The Asian Contribution

Sunny Sweet Potato Salad [Jan Arps-Prundeanu and Octavian Prundeanu] was the one contribution to our meal that used any of the curry spicing now common in the Caribbean. Sheila Lukins included the dish in the Vegetables section of her *All Around the World Cookbook* (1992) as a suggested accompaniment for jerk chicken or jerk pork ribs. The recipe calls for both Idaho and sweet potatoes; they are boiled, cooled, and diced, then combined with raw scallions, flat-leaf parsley, and a dressing made from mayonnaise, mango chutney, and curry powder. Unlike cooks in South Asia, who generally prepare their own curry paste, among Indo-Caribbean cooks it is quite standard to use curry powder, which is called “curry” in English but *kerrie* in the Dutch Caribbean and *colombo* on the French islands.

The sweet potato, as noted earlier, was cultivated in the Caribbean by Amerindians, and the white potato was introduced there from South America by Europeans during colonial times. But how and when did foods such as curry spices and mango chutney jump from South Asia to the New World?

That happened because of slavery— or rather, because of its abolition. To replace enslaved laborers, between 1838 and 1920 at least 500,000 workers from northern India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, and another 175,000 from China and Java, were brought to the islands of the Caribbean to labor as indentured servants on British, French, Spanish, and Dutch colonial plantations.



The imprint of Asian customs on Caribbean culture and cuisine would be profound. For example, a huge Chinatown arose in Old Havana. The eateries there popularized dishes like roast pork with five-spice powder, shrimp in black (fermented) soybean sauce, and *arroz frito*, a wok-made fried rice. The Chinese presence also helps explain why oyster sauce, soy sauce, and rice vinegar are kitchen staples on Cuba, Trinidad, and some other islands. In Jamaica, ginger, soy sauce, and five-spice powder became not uncommon components of jerk seasoning. Meanwhile, since the Netherlands had a long colonial history in both the East and West Indies, dishes of Indonesian heritage are especially prominent in Dutch parts of the Caribbean.

Indian migrants and their descendants popularized the use of such ingredients as leafy greens, eggplants, mangoes, *masalas* and other spice mixtures, *ghee*, coconut and sesame oils for frying, tamarind paste, and chutneys. They prepared dishes that became fixtures of island cuisine, such as the *pelau* or *pilau*, a meat and rice stew descended from the Persian *pilaf*. Others among the newcomers were Hindus whose vegetarian practices were emulated, notably in Rastafarianism, a Christian movement that arose among Afro-Jamaicans in the 1930s. Most Rastafarians make vegetarianism an important aspect of their diet, which they call *Ital* (the word “vital” with the initial letter omitted).

Indo-Caribbean cuisine acquired a high public profile with the arrival of entrepreneurial-minded immigrants after World War 2, and especially in the 1960s. Today, South Asian fare—curried foods wrapped in *roti* flatbreads, spicy deep-fried vegetarian fritters (made with pea meal), baked meat-pies, and dishes such as curried lamb (or kid goat) and vermicelli-noodle puddings—is wildly popular at street stalls and in homes all over the Caribbean. ■

A Pioneer of American Culinary History

Remembering Jan Longone (1933-2022)

Janice Bluestein Longone, the founder and Honorary President of the CHAA and an internationally recognized expert on the history of food and cooking in the U.S., passed away last Aug. 3 in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She had struggled with increasing health problems over the last few years, and she died three days after her 89th birthday.

Known as a voracious collector of documents and knowledge about culinary history, Jan was consulted by such leading chefs and writers as James Beard, Craig Claiborne, M. F. K. Fisher, Julia Child, Alan Davidson, and Rick Bayless. Unlike many “foodies”, she didn’t see cuisine as merely a matter of consumption or sensual gratification. Much less was it grounds for one-upsmanship, faddishness, or snobbery.

Instead, she viewed culinary history as an intellectual endeavor rich with social lessons. She became the first Curator of American Culinary History at the Univ. of Michigan and the driving force in creating the Janice Bluestein Longone Culinary Archive there, one of North America’s leading resources for the study of food history.

A celebration of Jan’s life is in the works for a later date. She is survived by her husband Dan and by her brother in Florida, Bernard Bluestein, and his wife Annette, plus three generations of nieces and nephews.

A Whole New Resource for American History

Along with a handful of others, such as John and Karen Hess, Laura Shapiro, and Waverly Root, Jan Longone was among the first to develop the study of American cuisine as a serious discipline calling for all of the skills that researchers can muster. As James Beard once put it, she “codified American culinary history and created a benchmark.” Even more impressive is the fact that Jan began this work in the early 1960s, a time when most food scholars scoffed at the idea that America—which had become a land of convenience foods and a “fast-food nation”—has a culinary history that is even worth studying.

She was shy but tenacious in the face of such skepticism. For decades she was working as an independent scholar in a famous college town—that was an era when museums and universities denied that cooking and domestic work have a place in historical collections. Jan Longone showed, on the contrary, that culinary archives make possible a new way to interpret American history. She amassed one of the country’s largest collections of cookbooks, menus, advertisements, and other artifacts of Ameri-



Robert Chase/Ann Arbor News (Feb. 20, 2000)

can dining habits—and she helped change conditions to the point where the study of such materials is now accepted as an academic discipline.

“In the past, that’s the kind of thing no library would consciously collect”, she told a local reporter in 2009. “If you gave them a box of junk—to them it’s junk—they wouldn’t know what to do with it. How do you catalog 500 pieces of paper that have nothing to do with great men?”

Relentless in hunting down rare items, Jan’s quest took her across continents and even turned up previously-unknown materials. She brought to light the only surviving copy of an 1866 work by Malinda Russell in Michigan, the earliest known Black-authored cookbook published in the country.

“We can think of no one else who has made more significant contributions to the field”, stated the Board of Directors of the Culinary Historians of New York in Nov. 2011 when it presented Longone the Amelia Award. Named for Amelia Simmons, author of the first American cookbook (1796), the award is given for extraordinary lifetime achievement in culinary history. Among other honors, Jan won the 2000 Silver Spoon Award from *Food Arts* magazine, the 2007 Cordon d’Or Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Culinary Academy of Florida, and the 2018 Carol DeMasters Service to Food Journalism Award from the Association of Food Journalists.

A Library Card at Age 5

Even in her 80s, when she hadn’t lived in New England in more than five decades, one could still hear her accent when Jan said words like “farm”, “tavern”, and “squash”.

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She was raised in a six-family tenement house in Dorchester, a multiethnic neighborhood in Boston. Jan was the middle of three children of Alexander and Edith Bluestein, both of whom were secular Ukrainian Jews who had emigrated from Eastern Europe.

The Bluestein family was poor, and so were all of the other local families, most of them Irish. Jan recalled playing by the railroad tracks with her friends, collecting pieces of coal briquettes dropped from passing trains. She and the other girls used them to build fires so they could roast potatoes over them.

Jan's was not a food-obsessed family, although meals frequently became the setting for impromptu discussions of Jewish food customs. Her father, Alexander, a restaurant equipment salesman, liked to quiz Janice and her siblings, Louise and Bernard, on their knowledge of dishes like *holishkes* and *gefilte* fish. Later, after Jan went off to graduate school, letters from her mother, Edith, sometimes included her recipes and advice about potato kugel, blintzes, *kasha varnishkes*, matzo balls, and other foods. Jan kept many of those her whole life.

But growing up, her mind was focused not on food but on books. Curiosity was a trait that had emerged early and would characterize her whole life; her mother quipped that little Jan was born reading a book. She was only 5 years old when she had her photo published in the newspaper as the youngest child ever to receive a library card in Boston. Later, as she made her way through the school grades, what most fascinated her was learning about societies and how they evolve. It was only in grad school that she would draw a connection among the three things—food, books, and society.

But What's a "Typical American Meal"?

Jan earned a bachelor's degree in history and education at Bridgewater State Teachers College, south of Boston, in 1954. That same year, she married Daniel T. Longone (lawn-GO-nee), her sweetheart from their teen years, who would become her lifelong partner in gastronomic adventures of all kinds. Dan had been raised in the old industrial city of Worcester, in a neighborhood with many Eastern European immigrants; his own background was Italian-American and Catholic. The families had met when they spent Summers renting neighboring cottages on Cape Cod or making day-trips to Revere Beach, just north of Boston.

Soon after they got married, Dan presented Jan a copy of the first cookbook from *Gourmet* magazine. The couple noticed a two-dollars-off coupon inside for a lifetime subscription, and they decided they could scrimp and afford it. Reading the magazine each month would change their lives; it kindled an intense interest in recipes and in the history and culture of food around the world. "The minute the postman brought it," Jan recalled to CHAA member Mary Bilyeu, writing in the *Toledo Blade*, "I stopped everything and read it cover to cover." The Longones would later frequently travel to many of the prime locales in France and Spain that were described in this "Magazine of Good Living".



Ann Arbor News (Sep. 19, 1963)

With recipes, utensils, and clothing collected from her visits to Mexico, Jan demonstrates how to prepare a dish of chicken *mole* in Ann Arbor in 1963.

After college, they attended Cornell Univ. together as graduate students, Jan studying Chinese and Indian history and working in the Rural Sociology Dept. while Dan studied organic chemistry. They had a group of friends and colleagues who took turns hosting dinner get-togethers—grad students and some faculty members. Most of them were born in India and other foreign countries, and the meals invariably featured international dishes and conversation about them. Jan gained practice making such fare using cookbooks that she found at used bookshops. "The more diverse our friends and our lives became," she later reflected, "the more we wanted to know about the role of food in history."

Once, though, when the Longones' turn to host the gathering came around again, the others asked Jan to make a typical *American* meal for a change. Having grown up in a Jewish household, and wondering what "typical American meal" even meant, she hit the campus library and started to realize—more deeply than ever before—that food is connected to all other aspects of culture, including literature. A whole world was opening up for her, and it helped launch her lifelong quest in collecting historical cookbooks and other culinary materials.

Jan also discovered that she had a real talent in the kitchen. As she recalled for Detroit journalist Laura Berman in 1996: "Somehow with cooking, I had the nose, the sense of smell, the ability to see instantly if a recipe might work, and so I thought, 'How nice. I can do this.'"

Catering and Teaching

In 1959, after Dan had completed a Ph.D. in chemistry and had worked briefly in industry, the two moved to Ann Arbor so he could start a teaching position at the Univ. of Michigan. On the near west side of that Midwestern college town, a modest house became their home—and eventually their business—for more than 60 years.

There, Jan deepened her interest in preparing traditional foods of high quality. She catered parties, and taught private classes in gourmet cooking. In 1968 she helped start Kitchen Port, a kitchen supply store located in the Kerrytown shopping district. Like millions of others at the time, she was greatly inspired by Julia Child's "The French Chef" (1963-73), one of the first TV cooking shows in the U.S., produced by WGBH in Boston. Child's approach to cooking was a clear break from the industrial convenience foods that had overtaken the American kitchen and, as with *Gourmet* magazine, her show popularized a more traditional European sensibility to cooking and eating.

Jan also became active in politics at the local and state levels. In the mid-1960s she campaigned for U.S. Rep. Weston E. "Wes" Vivian (D-MI), a liberal UM professor of electrical engineering, and served as a field representative for him when he was elected.

In 1967, the Longones began teaching classes on food, wine, and cooking for the UM Extension Service. Dan's side of their expertise was in the global history and production of wine. To prepare for a course in the history of gastronomy, Jan spent more than a year researching the subject and compiling a path-breaking bibliography. But more and more, she needed references that weren't available in campus libraries, and so she began purchasing them. Hers was becoming a real collection in its own right.

A Treasure Trove in the Basement

Ending up with multiple copies of certain books—ostensibly by accident—in 1972 Jan launched the idea of trying to sell the extras to discerning customers. Thus was born The Wine and Food Library, a home-based business selling out-of-print and rare or antiquarian books by mail order or private appointment.

It also launched a whole professional career, because the couple found that there was an unmet hunger for such books. Over time, their stock grew to

become the country's largest specialty culinary bookstore. Between their personal collection stored in their ground-floor living room and offices, and their larger stock of for-sale items in the basement, they owned about 20,000 neatly shelved volumes. The most valuable tomes, however, were kept in a bank vault. In fact, the endeavor became so serious that, to fortify her background knowledge, Jan took courses in the mechanics and history of paper, printing, and bookmaking.

The Longones found most of the books and other materials for their collection at shops and estate sales, especially during Summer road trips to and from Massachusetts or while traveling in Europe. They also bid at auctions. Jan sometimes made buying trips to New York and returned with as many as 200 books, some of them for the shelves at home and others for collector friends with special interests. "I'm the eyes and ears for my customers", she explained.

Flowing from her understanding that dining is related to all other aspects of society and culture, she realized that the food scholar needs access to myriad types of documentary evidence. "We need to know about transportation," she told one interviewer, "we need to know about the history of ice in America before refrigerators. How did the world change because of that?" Also fair game for the collection were household manuals, etiquette books, histories of cooking equipment, commercial brochures and advertisements, and selected biographies and travel books. They even stocked some food-related literary fiction and "gastromysteries".

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Jan autographs books in her basement bookstore in 1976.

Larry E. Wright/ *Ann Arbor News* (Nov. 3, 1976)



Some Testimonials

Jan was a pioneer scholar in food studies whose work inspired everyone in this field, and in bringing so much women's history to public light. She was a friend to us all— I will never forget our meetings and conversations about all manner of things. She will be missed and mourned.

— Dr. Bruce Kraig, food historian, *Prof. Emeritus* of History and Humanities at Roosevelt Univ. (Chicago), Founder and Pres. Emeritus of Culinary Historians of Chicago

My heart is broken! Jan was a mentor and a friend who always supported and encouraged me, and even gave me dreams I didn't know were possible.

— Mary Bilyeu, food columnist, *The Blade* (Toledo, OH)

I first met Jan in the mid-1970s when she permitted me to visit her basement bookstore. I was a cookbook collector and I had to see for myself what a really big cookbook collection looked like. Needless to say, I was blown away by its vastness. I purchased a small Lithuanian cookbook, which almost 50 years later still sits proudly amongst my 750 or so cookbooks. I am mostly grateful to Jan for involving me in her Univ. of Michigan project: I spent 10 retirement years involved in culinary matters, sometimes spending whole days at it. Her dedication and enthusiasm were what kept me going, and I will always think of our association as a happy memory.

— Phil Zaret, longtime CHAA member and volunteer docent with the Janice Bluestein Longone Culinary Archive

I always knew Jan was fun, since it was minutes within our first meeting that she shared a selection of the menus that she and Dan had collected. As a graduate student at SUNY just learning about fine dining and its history, those documents sparked my imagination in much the way that I suspect certain classmates of mine responded to maritime logbooks or 18th-Century pharmacy ledgers. For research in that course, I examined ethnic food advertising that Jan said hadn't been previously studied, including early marketing pamphlets from La Choy and from Gebhardt Mexican Foods. What impressed me most about my time with her was how seriously she took my research, and her conviction that pamphlets in the 1950s influence how we live and eat today. Her passion and enthusiasm for American food history gave me the confidence to continue studying it while my peers paged through musty journals kept by rich white men.

— Hanna Raskin, food journalist; Editor and publisher of *The Food Section* (Charleston, SC)

Jan was a cherished mentor and friend. Jan's energy was—to use one of her favorite accolades— *remarkable*, but even more remarkable was her generosity, her spirit of inquiry, her passion for books, and her commitment to ensuring researchers would benefit from the vast culinary collection that she and Dan assembled over their lifetime together. I imagine the stacks of future books yet unwritten that the Janice Bluestein Longone Culinary Archive at the University of Michigan will make possible, and the pleasure Jan would take if she could know her role in bringing those new books into being.

— Dr. Sarah Conrad Gothie, culinary historian, Moore College of Art & Design (Philadelphia)

To me, she was always the “mother” of Culinary History. I looked to her for guidance and inspiration, and waited to see what she was going to do next. She was so kind and generous with suggestions and advice, and I never hesitated to ask for her help. What a loss for the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor and for all the rest of us all over North America and elsewhere. Jan was a very special person.

— Dr. Shirley Cherkasky, historian and retired Coordinator of Public Programs at Smithsonian National Museum of American History; founder of the Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C. (CHoW) and the Culinary History Enthusiasts of Wisconsin (CHEW)

Jan and I go back a long way in a culinary journey that was both a friendly exchange and a shared sense of excitement when something wonderful and rare turned up. She was a great mentor to many people, and I think it is fair to say that she helped to shape the course of American culinary history as a branch of serious scholarship. Most important, Jan was simply a down-to-earth nice person and as generous as they come. I hope that her legacy lives on and that her example will inspire a new generation of culinarians.

— Dr. William Woys Weaver, food ethnographer and author, retired Adjunct Prof. of Food Studies at Drexel Univ. (Philadelphia)

She was such an exceptional person and friend. I've known her since 1979 when I joined the CHAA and in the following years, I made several trips to her basement “Library” to seek out interesting cook books to add to my collection. Our ensuing conversations were always most interesting, informative and valuable. In addition to being highly intelligent and knowledgeable, particularly in the culinary field, she was as kind and interesting a person as I'd ever met.

— Sherry Sundling, longtime CHAA member and retired caterer in Ann Arbor, MI.

JAN LONGONE

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Examples with more historical “heft” included:

- a 1530 edition of *De honesta voluptate et valetudine*, the world’s first printed culinary book, written by Vatican librarian Bartolomeo Platina
- La Varenne’s *Le Vrai Cuisinier François*, Nouvelle édition (Brussels, 1698), the first book to systematize the Parisian gastronomic innovations of the 17th Century, such as stocks and reductions, the reliance on butter instead of lard, and the use of *roux* as a sauce base
- Gen. Thomas Pinckney’s *Letter on the Water Culture of Rice*, published by the South Carolina Agricultural Society in 1823
- Carrie V. Shuman’s *Favorite Dishes*, a souvenir cookbook from the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago with a handsome art-nouveau cover.

Jan was famously generous with her time: any truly interested visitor would be welcomed in to sit and talk with her about the collection. Aided in part by the photographic memory with which she was blessed, she would dash back and forth to fetch books from the shelves according to the customer’s interests, her excitement overflowing and contagious. She wasn’t simply showing and telling them about the fascinating items; she was educating them in culinary history, and spreading her enthusiasm for the discipline like an evangelist.

“I’m One of the Luckiest People Alive”

Most sales by The Wine and Food Library resulted not from home visits, but instead from publicity via the thick catalogs that the bookshop published and sold twice a year.

The listings included not just publication details, but also the Longones’ judicious assessments of the contents. About Shuman’s *Favorite Dishes* cookbook from the 1893 World’s Fair, they wrote with typical penetrating discernment:

The recipes do not seem, by and large, to be specifically regional.... In fact, the homogenization of American cooking might be inferred by a careful look at the recipes: both the Boston Baked Beans and Cranberries are from a Nebraska Lady Manager, the Rhode Island Dish-White Corn Meal Cakes for Breakfast are from Michigan, and there are crab and lobster recipes from Idaho.

The catalogs were a treat for any book lover to peruse, and they circulated far and wide in the rarefied atmosphere inhabited by collectors and culinary trendsetters.

All kinds of customers began calling: an author seeking early works on chili peppers; a university librarian needing treatises on wine; the curator of a historical mansion who was organizing a 19th-Century afternoon tea— even the executive chef at a hotel in Addis Ababa who needed a Swedish cookbook. One new restaurant commissioned Jan to assemble for it a collection of the foremost regional American cookbooks. The Longones were such experts in food and wine literature that they were hired to develop some private collections and to do valuations of others.

“I’m one of the luckiest people alive”, Jan said about becoming friends with cooking luminaries from coast to coast. She first met celebrity chef Jeremiah Tower, for example, in 1974, when he worked at Chez Panisse in Berkeley and was planning a Florida theme meal; he learned that the Longones had regional menus even older than the Florida Territory. Decades later, in 2005, Tower would donate to Jan’s culinary archives his collection of about 200 menus from Chez Panisse and other California restaurants dating back to 1887, some of them autographed by famous chefs.

In 1975-78, Jan hosted “Adventures in Gastronomy”, a radio show about the culture surrounding food, wine, and cooking that was broadcast every Friday morning on WUOM, the university’s National Public Radio affiliate, with some national syndication. It’s believed to have been the first culinary show ever to be aired by a public radio station, beginning a trend that led to such blockbusters as “The Splendid Table”.

In the early 1980s, when she gave a lecture in England at the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, Jan was asked a question about American foods. At the end of the question the person added a comment to the effect that, “But you Americans don’t really have a national food tradition, do you.” Jan was silently insulted: to her it was obvious that the U.S. has a national food tradition, and to him it was not at all obvious. Yet, how best to go about changing this not uncommon but ill-informed perception? It so bothered her that she resolved as a life goal to continue her efforts in accruing knowledge of America’s distinctive culinary heritage and making it available to the world.

Later in that decade— and as if in furtherance of that mission— she was appointed to the Dover Publications advisory board for a series of facsimile reprints of American culinary classics. She wrote the scholarly introductions for works by the likes of Mary Randolph, Fannie Farmer, and Lydia Maria Child.

Gathering Together, Learning by Doing

In 1981, the Longones were among those who founded the American Institute of Wine & Food (AIWF), and served on its board of directors. The group, now based at the Univ. of California at San Diego and with chapters around the U.S., supports culinary arts degree programs and organizes educational events, tours, dinners, and an annual Conference on Gastronomy. It was the AIWF in 2001 that sponsored Julia Child’s Kitchen, a permanent installation at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History.

In 1983, Jan and Dan established the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor (CHAA), the second-oldest culinary history group in North America (after CH-Boston in 1980). Since the late 1970s they’d been talking over the idea with friends, many of whom they’d met via The Wine and Food Library. The Longones had already founded a few local wine appreciation groups, but those were private clubs with very specific aims. Their goal with CHAA was much broader: a public organization that would promote the study of culinary history as a whole, via regular programs open to anyone who wanted to learn about the subject and to help advance and popularize it.

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For the first 3½ years the CHAA meetings were held in the historic Second Ward Building in downtown Ann Arbor, generously made available by owners John and Mary Hathaway. The first formal gathering on Apr. 3, 1983, which crystallizes the excitement and vision of Jan and the other founding members, was a group-participation session on “Gastronomic Events I Would Like to Have Attended or Would Like to Re-live”. Participant Nili Tannenbaum later reported:

Jan Longone began the evening with a description of a three-day *alay* in Istanbul of 1638. A colorful procession of 735 guilds paraded before the sultan, each trying to outdo the others. Imagine the brilliantly-dressed marshals, the guilds of the Nightingale Dealers, Professional Tippers, Halvah Makers and Simit Sellers. In a competing fantasy, Jan took us to a meeting of the Royal Society in 17th-Century England on the day of the demonstration of Denis Papin’s “new digester”. Jan’s description of “the excitement of the Renaissance scientific inquiry, fine fellowship, and discussion of food and drink” came alive as she characterized the company of Evelyn, Digby, Papin, Boyle, and Wren.

We could taste the maple syrup as Andrea Leibson described breakfast with James McNeill Whistler. The fashion, music and art of La Belle Époque and menus hand-painted by the host delighted such guests as Oscar Wilde, Lillie Langtry, Henry Irving, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Dorothy Whallon Fish described her dream dinner at La Pyramide in the time of Fernand Point, followed by port and good conversation with the chef. Doug Campbell’s thoughts also turned to Point, beginning each day with champagne and finding an innovative way for two inebriated guests to settle their bill.

Ann Larimore conjured up images of Persian carpets strewn with white damask and mammoth silver trays laden with aromatic foods at the Faesl of Saudi sheiks. The most famous dish was a camel stuffed with an ox, stuffed with a sheep, and further progressions of goat, turkey, pigeon, and ultimately an olive....

By the end of the 1980s, CHAA’s membership roster had swelled to nearly 100. The members included food writers, professors, students, restaurant chefs, nutritionists, book collectors, and other interested members of the public, mostly from the college towns of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti, and some from the Detroit area.

The monthly gatherings typically drew 25-35 attendees for a formal presentation, either by a member or, more often, an invited speaker with special expertise. There were also occasional field trips and tours, such as to see food-related museum exhibits, Rentschler Farm Museum, Calder Dairy Farm, Matthaei Botanical Gardens, Zingerman’s Bakehouse, and various ethnic restaurants. A few meetings per year continued to be earmarked as member participation events, such as “Food Memories from My Childhood” (Dec 21, 1986) or— on an increasingly more regular schedule— learning-by-doing “potluck” meals on a chosen theme, such as the “Picnique Française” (Aug. 20, 1989)



Robert Chase/ Ann Arbor News (Jan. 18, 1984)

Jan and Dan Longone examine a display case at “American Cookbooks and Wine Books 1797-1950” (Clements Library 1984), the world’s first serious exhibit about American culinary history.

held at Seven Lakes Vineyard in Fenton, MI, which was timed to mark the bicentennial of the French Revolution.

Since there were several outstanding cooks and professional chefs in the ranks of CHAA, Jan and the other early leaders had to take care that the group not become simply a cooking club or a way to show off kitchen skills or dining experiences. Cooking ability is in no way a requirement for membership, and most of the members are amateurs at it. Everyone, however, is serious about the learning aspect of the potluck meals; they take turns discussing their dishes in front of the entire group before everyone dives in to sample the fare laid out on the banquet table.

Jan served as CHAA Chairperson until early 1989, and remained its Honorary President until her passing. She presented many talks to the group, and throughout the 1980s and 1990s she regularly wrote articles for the group’s newsletter, most of them under the column name “From the Past”. Her husband Dan served as Treasurer for decades.

The First U.S. Culinary History Exhibit Anywhere

Starting about 1980, the Longones had begun donating from their collection a special item every now and then to the Univ. of Michigan's William L. Clements Library, a leading repository of rare books and manuscripts from pre-20th Century America. Library director Dr. John C. Dann was already a personal book-buying customer of the Longones, and had observed that all who visited their bookshop "find their enthusiasm irresistible. They will sensitize you to ask fresh questions of sources, both new and old." Before long, he asked Jan and Dan to guest-curate an exhibit—a highly unusual invitation, since Clements exhibits almost always focus on books held by the library itself.

The exhibit, in 1984, was "American Cookbooks and Wine Books 1797-1950". Jan recalled later that until then, "no one, anywhere, anyplace, had ever mounted a serious exhibition" about American culinary history accompanied by a *catalogue raisonné*—"a fact that horrified me." Accordingly, this show made a very big splash. James Beard, writing in the *Boston Globe*, called it "an unequaled feat of culinary scholarship."

Jan would go on to organize about a dozen other exhibits at the Clements, beginning with "Mother Maize and King Corn: The Persistence of Corn in the American Ethos" (1986), "Foods of the New World" (1992) during the Columbus Quincentennial, "Food at the Fair: The World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893" (1994), and "American Cookery: The Bicentennial, 1796-1996" (1996), which marked the 200th anniversary of the publication of the first American cookbook, by Amelia Simmons, and the 100th anniversary of the publication of Fannie Farmer's *Boston Cooking School Cook Book*. That exhibit, which displayed one important cookbook from each of the 200 years, received coverage from CNN.

A Permanent University Archive

John Dann was so impressed with Jan's exhibits and with the relevance of food to American history that in Fall 1999, he asked her to accept a permanent spot at the Clements Library as Curator of American Culinary History. She talked it over with her husband:

It was both a difficult and an easy decision. Difficult because we knew how much work would be required, and we had been looking forward to a contemplative and traveling retirement. Easy because we knew we were the right people in the right place at the right time. Academia was beginning to value the importance of culinary history.

Jan's position at the Clements was the first of its kind in the country, underscoring the heightened stature of food history studies—a change that her own work had helped bring about.

When she accepted the post, Dr. Dann essentially told her: "Build an archive second to none that you would come visit if you didn't live here." Jan soon realized that that mandate could be fulfilled if she and Dan merged their own huge collection with the already-existing holdings of the Clements. Thus took shape the Janice Bluestein Longone Culinary Archive (JBLCA), a trove of more than 30,000 items. The materials were donated over the



Wearing one of her favorite accessories—a chili-pepper necklace—Jan gives a Sep. 2013 talk at the Univ. of Michigan on "American Foodways: The Jewish Contribution, 1660-2013".

course of many years to allow Jan and a corps of dedicated volunteer docents time to properly study and catalog them.

The docents, inspired by Jan and by the great project to which her life's work had led, collectively logged thousands of hours every year working on the archive. As she commented in 2001, "They have done wonders. Without them, the creation of this archive would probably have been impossible, or at least would have taken a much, much, much longer time."

The archive was formally dedicated at the Clements Library in 2005, and in 2013 it was transferred to Special Collections at the UM's Harlan Hatcher Graduate Library. The move increased the educational utility of the collection and eased its ability to expand past the year 1900, the nominal cutoff date for the Clements.

The inception of the JBLCA was noticed as a significant step forward in the scholarly study of American cuisine. As Dr. Marion Nestle at New York Univ. recalled to the *New York Times* after Jan's death, "Other libraries were uninterested in collecting food materials, but she knew exactly what she had and why it mattered. I was awe-struck meeting her and wanted all that for NYU."

The archives' depth and breadth are breathtaking. Only about half of the materials are cookbooks; the rest include food and travel books, manuscript recipe collections, diaries, letters, periodicals, menus, and ephemera. Examples of the manuscripts are *A Book of Receipts for Cake &c.* by Lucretia Lyon (Michigan, 1827-1850) and the Sherrard Family receipt book (southeastern Ohio, 1850-1910).

Examples from the periodicals collection include sets of *What to Eat*, *The Cooking Club*, *German Housewife*, *Kitchen*

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Selected Publications of Janice B. Longone

(with Daniel T. Longone), "American Cookbooks and Wine Books 1797-1950" (Univ. of Michigan William L. Clements Library, 1984).

"Portable Soup", *The Journal of Gastronomy* (AIWF), 1:4 (1985).

Mother Maize and King Corn: The Persistence of Corn in the American Ethos (Univ. of Michigan William L. Clements Library, 1986).

(with Daniel T. Longone), "Camp Cookery in the American Civil War: The Florence Nightingale and Alexis Soyer Connections", *Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, 1991: Public Eating* (Prospect Books, 1992), pp. 186-191.

Introductions to facsimile reprints of American culinary classics from Dover Publications:

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(with Cecilia Fileti, Lili Krezel, and Joanne Nesbit), guide to the exhibit "The Life and Death of *Gourmet: The Magazine of Good Living*, January 1941-November 2009" (2014). Available at http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/2027.42/120259/1/Gourmet_14.pdf.

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1:1 (February 2001), pp. 96-99: "Early Black-Authored American Cookbooks".

1:2 (Spring 2001), pp. 65-71: "Professor Blot and the First French Cooking School in New York (Part 1)".

1:3 (Summer 2001), pp. 53-59: "Professor Blot and the First French Cooking School in New York (Part 2)".

1:4 (Fall 2001), pp. 104-107: "*The Cook: An Early American Culinary Magazine*".

2:2 (Spring 2002), pp. 97-102: "*Berney's Mystery of Living and Other Nineteenth-Century Cooking Magazines*".

2:4 (Fall 2002), pp. 86-89: "The Mince Pie That Launched the Declaration of Independence, and Other Recipes in Rhyme".

3:2 (Spring 2003), pp. 104-110: "'As Worthless as Savorless Salt'? Teaching Children to Cook, Clean, and (Often) Conform".

3:4 (Fall 2003), pp. 92-96: "10 Ways to Cook Oyster Crabs and 9990 Other Recipes" [on published series of American cookbooks].

4:2 (Spring 2004), pp. 84-89: "'What is your name? My name is Ah Quong. Well, I will call you Charlie.'" [early ethnic American cookbooks].

6:2 (Spring 2006), pp. 82-87: "Grow Strong and Great as I Have" [patriotic food advertising].

6:4 (Fall 2006) (with Susan Odom), pp. 87-90: "Jelly Jammers, Pie Birders, and Other Passionate Collectors".

Periodicals from the Univ. of Michigan's William L. Clements Library

(All are freely accessible at

<https://clements.umich.edu/about/the-quarto>):

In *The American Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, mostly under the heading "From the Kitchen":

1:1 (Spring-Summer 1985), pp. 46-48: "Culinary Recipes in Pre-Civil War America" [the manuscript cookbook of Elizabeth C. Kane, New York].

1:2 (Autumn-Winter 1985-86), pp. 44-47: "Shish Kebab Comes to the United States".

2:1 (Spring-Summer 1986), pp. 62-67: "Indian Pudding, One of the Glories of American Cuisine".

2:2 (Autumn-Winter 1986-87), pp. 56-63: "A Favorite English Dish Americanized" [apple pie].

3:1 (Spring-Summer 1987), pp. 28-44: "A Sufficiency and No More, a Graphic Description of the American Kitchen of the 1850s".

3:2 (Autumn-Winter 1987-88), pp. 52-60: "The Tomato in American Cooking".

4:1 (Spring-Summer 1988), pp. 34-43: "There Were Always Oysters".

4:2 (Autumn-Winter 1988-89), pp. 47-55: "The Remarkable Miss Leslie".

In *The Quarto* (New Series):

15 (Spring 2001), pp. 6-7: "Culinary Detroit".

17 (Spring 2002), pp. 9-10: "Columbian Fare".

23 (Spring-Summer 2005), pp. 2-4: "Have You No National Dishes?".

25 (Spring-Summer 2006), pp. 12-14: "When Getting There Was Half the Fun".

26 (Fall-Winter 2006), pp. 10-13: "An A to Z of Regional and Ethnic Culinary Traditions".

28 (Fall-Winter 2007), pp. 6-7: "I Ask the Ballot for Myself and My Sex".

29 (Spring-Summer 2008), pp. 8-10: "Of Men and Markets" [in N.Y. City].

31 (Spring-Summer 2009), pp. 11-13: "A Beautiful and Fruitful Place: Dutch Contributions to the American Table".

34 (Fall-Winter 2010), pp. 7-9: "'Learning How to Cook and Kill at the Same Time': Cookery in the American Civil War, the Alexis Soyer and Florence Nightingale Connections".

JAN LONGONE

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Clatter, and the *Journal of Home Economics*. There are also many issues from the 1886-1966 publication history of *The Bakers' Journal*, the official organ of the Bakery and Confectionery Workers' International Union of America, whose members were largely Jews of German heritage.

Stored in over 100 boxes are more than 2,000 catalogued menus, among them one for the American Maize Banquet that was held in Copenhagen in 1893 at the Hotel King of Denmark. Apart from the menus, there are more than 10,000 collected examples of food industry promotional booklets and other culinary ephemera, carefully catalogued and stored in over 300 boxes by category. Examples include *A Short History of the Banana and a Few Recipes for Its Use* (United Fruit Co., Boston, 1904), *Paper-bag Cookery: Complete Directions and Recipes* (Union Bag and Paper Co., New York, 1912), and *Choice Recipes* (Walter Baker Chocolate Co., Dorchester, MA, 1912).

Discovering Malinda Russell

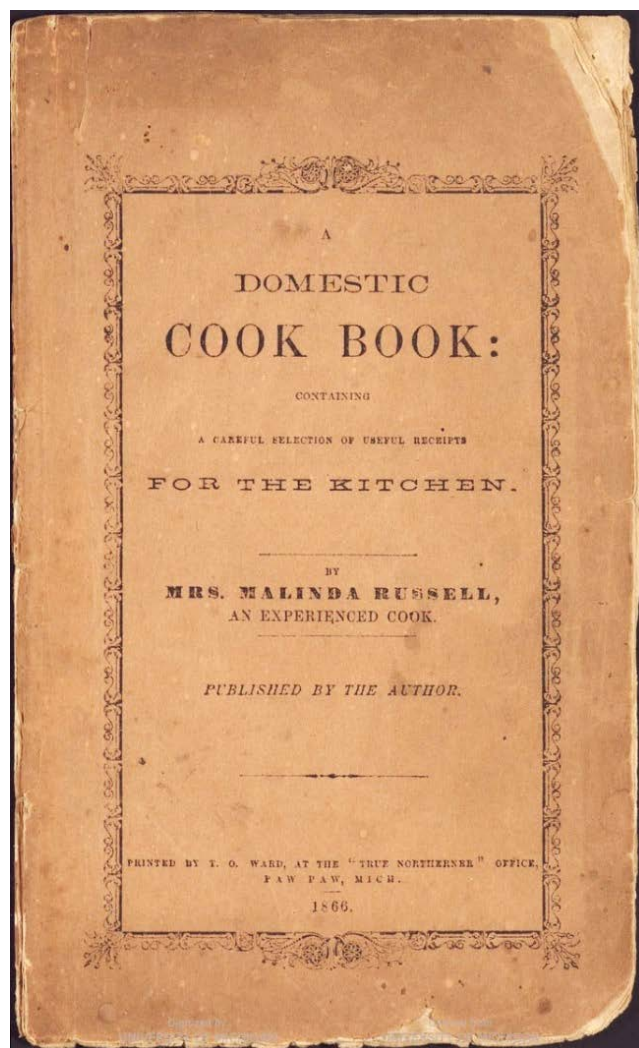
By the turn of the millennium, there were institutions far beyond the Univ. of Michigan that were relying on Jan's expertise. She was made the lead writer for the Feeding America project organized by Michigan State Univ. Libraries, which in 2001-3 created a digital archive of 76 historical U.S. cookbooks (<https://d.lib.msu.edu/fa>). In 2002, she was appointed to the Advisory Committee for COPIA: The American Center for Wine, Food and the Arts in Napa, CA. She wrote the article on American Cookbooks, and related entries, for *The Oxford Companion to Food* (1999), and she served as an Associate Editor for *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America* (2005).

In 2001 Jan was a founding member of the Advisory Board of the quarterly *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*. She also contributed 11 articles there over the next six years, most of them under the series name "Notes on Vintage Volumes".

The very first of her *Gastronomica* articles, "Early Black-Authored American Cookbooks", rocked the culinary history world. Jan revealed that she'd recently turned up a copy of a previously unnoticed such cookbook, which instantly became—and remains—the earliest known African American printed book devoted solely to cookery, replacing the spot previously held by Abby Fisher's 1881 cookbook from San Francisco.

The Longones had received a call from a West Coast book dealer about a 40-page booklet that was at the bottom of a box of materials left by the California food writer Helen Evans Brown (1904-64). It was titled *A Domestic Cookbook: Containing a Careful Selection of Useful Receipts for the Kitchen* (Paw Paw, Michigan, 1866), and had been written and self-published by one Malinda Russell, a free Black cook and businesswoman from the South.

Dan and Jan were able to buy the tattered treasure for \$200. "When it came in, I almost passed out", Jan recalled to CHAA member Robin Watson, writing in *The Detroit News*. "I was astonished: Here was a book nobody had ever heard of—and I had the only copy of it! I thought, 'This is probably one of the most important books in America.'" She later learned that many



The only surviving copy of Malinda Russell's *A Domestic Cookbook* (1866), the earliest known African American printed cookbook, was brought to light by Jan Longone in 2001.

copies of *A Domestic Cookbook* had been lost in a devastating fire just months after its publication.

The Longones soon donated their one-of-a-kind copy to the Clements Library, which published a facsimile edition in 2007. In the Introduction, Jan expressed the hope that its appearance would stimulate further research and thereby allow Malinda Russell "to take her rightful place at the American culinary history table." She briefly characterized the book's 250 or so food recipes (which are mostly for baked goods and sweets), and summed up what was known of the author's life. By Russell's own account, she had been born and raised in eastern Tennessee in the 1820s. Her maternal grandparents had been enslaved and emancipated in Virginia, and she had learned to cook and bake from a Black cook in that state named Fanny Steward. At the time of writing, Malinda was the widowed mother of a crippled son. For 20 years she had worked as a hired cook and a nurse companion for prominent white families in Tennessee and neighboring states—and at various points had run a boarding house, a laundry, and a pastry shop—until the Civil War, when she fled north to Michigan after a series of violent attacks and robberies.

continued on next page

JAN LONGONE

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"Hers was a life of 'hard labor' and travail," Jan concluded, "but she overcame all her hardships and setbacks with an indomitable spirit. It is truly an American story." Russell herself reported that in publishing *A Domestic Cookbook* at a newspaper printing office in Paw Paw, her hope was that she might "receive enough from the sale of it to enable me to return home" to Tennessee, she wrote, "to try to recover at least a part of my property." She added, "I know my book will sell well where I have cooked, and am sure those using my receipts will be well satisfied."

Indeed, merely perusing the contents of the book—including such refined dishes as trifle, blancmange, Charlotte Russe, and a "rose cake" expensively reddened with cochineal—cuts against the narrow view of Southern Black cooking as simply "soul food", the food of slave plantations and poverty. Instead, Russell's book managed to distinguish and codify a whole different set of Southern cooking practices. Toni Tipton-Martin in Austin, TX, told the *New York Times* that the cookbook that Jan had brought to light "dispels the notion of a universal African-American food experience.... It is an Emancipation Proclamation for Black cooks."

This Discipline Has Entered Its Teen Years

In the Spring of 2005 and 2007, Jan organized major symposia on American culinary history at UM. Each of the gatherings engaged a diverse roster of presenters and drew 200-300 attendees from throughout the Midwest and across the country—academics, writers, collectors, and culinary enthusiasts. In addition to the illustrated lectures, the conferences included field trips, exhibits of materials related to the presentations, launch events for two new books, a musicale of historic American culinary songs, and some grand American meals, including one at historic Greenfield Village in Dearborn, MI.

In his conference opening remarks in 2005, John Dann emphasized that culinary history was still a very young field, but one with huge potential as a tool for the study of history. "Jan signed on in its infancy and was one of the true pioneers", he said, in nurturing a scholarship that, four decades later, "has entered its 'teen years'."

In 2007, the symposium focused on the theme of Regional and Ethnic Traditions. The list of topics was a pageant of the vibrant and varied cuisines of America and of the colorful imprints that were left on the national fabric by African American and immigrant groups. In conjunction with the theme, Jan curated an exhibit of 125 historical books together with other items, called "A to Z: An Alphabet of Regional and Ethnic American Culinary Traditions". On display were cookbooks in English and/or foreign languages, cookbooks written to preserve ethnic traditions and others directed at Americanizing the users. The earliest such books, from the mid-1800s, are scarce today.

After one of the symposia an attendee from Chapel Hill, NC, wrote to Jan: "I came away inspired, overwhelmed and excited about the state of American culinary and foodways scholarship. You are the visionary behind this, and I am grateful for all you do

for individual scholars and for the field at large." A participant from a library commented, "The Longone Center is and will remain the foremost national repository for the study of American culinary history. For other institutions, like my own, that have American cook book or culinary collections, the Longone Center is a model for focused, systematic and cohesive collection development."

There were plans to continue the symposia on a biennial basis, but after John Dann retired in Summer 2007, the plans got shelved. Nevertheless, work on the archive by Jan and her docents continued unabated, as did her exhibit curating. Shows from later years included "The Iceman Cometh...and Goeth!: The Ice Industry in America" (2004), "Patriotic Fare: Bunker Hill Pickles, Abe Lincoln Tomatoes, Washington Crisps and Uncle Sam Apples" (2006), "American Foodways: The Jewish Contribution, 1660-2013" (2013, co-curated with Ph.D. student Avery Robinson), "The Life and Death of *Gourmet—The Magazine of Good Living*" (2014), and "Dining Out: Menus, Chefs, Restaurants, Hotels, and Guide Books" (2015).

The Old Girl Network

Across decades, Jan was tapped for service as a judge in national food-related book award competitions, including those organized by the AIWF, the James Beard Foundation, and the International Association of Culinary Professionals (IACP).

But the judging that she found most gratifying was for the Tabasco Community Cookbook Awards, which culminated every year at McIlhenny Co. headquarters on Avery Island, LA. Participating since their inception in 1990, she later reflected: "It is a highlight of my year. The opportunity to see hundreds of contemporary fundraising cookbooks and meet the (mostly) women involved has been a grand learning experience and has added to my understanding of the importance of these books for the study of American culinary history."

Charity fundraising cookbooks that compile contributed recipes is a trend that sprang up in America during the Civil War, when the earliest one was published in 1864 to raise money for war victims and their families. The "community cookbook" quickly became a publishing phenomenon and an enduring legacy of the war. Jan determined that over 5,000 of them were published in the U.S. between 1864 and 1920 (when the 19th Amendment granting women's voting rights was ratified), sold mostly at fairs, bazaars, and women's exchanges. The books had long captivated her interest and she had patiently accumulated as many as she could find—eventually a trove of about 2,000 published in all 50 states. It is the largest known assemblage of pre-1920 charity cookbooks, and it represents a key strength of the Longone Archive.

Jan saw this part of the collection as an especially fertile resource for examining changes in American culture, from the impact of technology or immigration to the evolving status of women. The books, she said, also show how women worked together to help themselves or to advance anything from a church cause to a war effort, as well as movements for peace, alcohol temperance, voting rights, or educational opportunities.

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BERNIE AGRANOFF

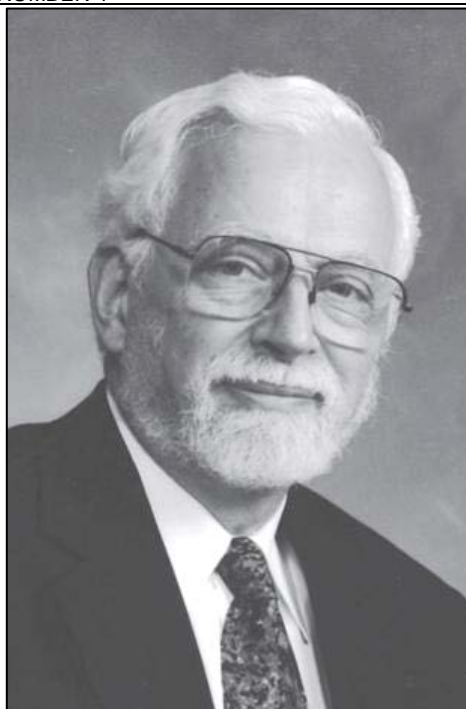
(1926-2022)

Bernard William “Bernie” Agranoff, 96, a Univ. of Michigan neuroscientist who along with his wife, Raquel “Ricky” Agranoff, was an important member of the CHAA in its early years, passed away in Ann Arbor on Oct. 21. He was a path-breaking investigator of brain biochemistry, especially noted for his research on the role of lipids in nervous system cell signaling and his later discovery that protein synthesis is a requirement for the formation of long-term memories. His wife Ricky died two years before him (see our obituary in the Summer 2020 issue). They are survived by their sons Adam (in Ann Arbor) and William (in Seattle) and their families.

Bernie was born and raised in Detroit, and completed B.S. and M.D. degrees at UM (Ann Arbor) and Wayne State Univ. (Detroit), respectively. After working for nine years at NIH in Washington, he moved the family to Ann Arbor in 1960 so he could begin work as a research scientist at UM. Capping a career of more than four decades there, he retired in 2003 as a Professor of Biological Chemistry in the Dept. of Psychiatry, and a Senior Research Scientist at what is now the Michigan Neuroscience Institute, where he had been Director during 1985-95. He also co-authored the first six editions of *Basic Neurochemistry*, the field’s leading textbook, which has trained generations of neuroscientists.

Dr. Agranoff’s findings on the relation between protein and memory were based on lab experiments with goldfish, but the link was soon confirmed in humans and other animals as well. Such results eventually prompted him to write an article “Brain Food” in *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* (Summer 2008). The article traced, both in the realm of science and in popular belief, the historical emergence of the notion that fish is a protein-rich “brain food”. It went on to detail how traditional fish-based diets, such as those of Japan and Scandinavia, maintain a balance of omega fatty acids that appears to foster neural function better than does the typical diet of the Western industrialized world. Interestingly, among those whom Dr. Agranoff acknowledged as helpful reviewers of the article was T. R. Durham, proprietor of Durham’s Tricklements and Smokery, an Ann Arbor purveyor of artisanal fish products.

Both Ricky and Bernie were members of CHAA from the late 1980s until 2016. Ricky, a trained chef, felt as comfortable in the culinary scene in Ann Arbor as in the world-class gastronomic regions that she experienced during their travels. She launched a cooking school and catering company in town, managed a kitchen supply store, later co-founded a fine restaurant, and eventually wrote a trio of cookbooks. The two also joined a local wine and food appreciation group, The Whinos. Many of these experiences were conveyed in articles and talks for the CHAA. For example, in her talk “A Travelling Gourmet in China” (Jan. 1990) and in a pair of articles in the Fall 1989 issue of this newsletter, Ricky described in detail the cuisine that she and Bernie had encountered during a five-week trip around China, where he had guest-lectured that Fall. “Since we are both very interested in food,” she added by way of explanation, “we made it a point to seek out the interesting culinary experiences.” ■



University of Michigan

JAN LONGONE *continued from page 32*

During an era, Jan pointed out, when women could gain entry to professions only with great difficulty, the collective work involved in publishing such a book afforded significant opportunities to learn and to network. And at a time when women were denied full political rights and representation, these books served as a means for half of the public to participate in the public life of the nation. Against the charge that they were neglecting their families while they went out politicking, suffragists used the community cookbooks to help make the argument that “good cooking and sure voting went hand in hand.” In fact, Jan interpreted this wave of cookbooks as the first wave of the women’s movement, and wrote that it fomented “politics just under every woman’s nose (and, often, behind many men’s backs).”

In 2008, Jan used the community cookbooks for an exhibit at the Clements, “The Old Girl Network: Charity Cookbooks and the Empowerment of Women”. She delivered the opening lecture there, and she would reprise it in various forms at venues across the U.S. over the next several years. With thousands more of these cookbooks waiting to be collected, she liked to begin the talk by joking that she had considered charging everyone in the audience an admission fee of “one charity cookbook that we do not own yet”!

The remark captures a lot about Jan Longone. She did indeed have an insatiable hunger for collecting books and other archival materials—our discipline has gained so much because of her serious approach toward studying them. But alongside that utter dedication, her sense of humor was also one of her most endearing qualities. And it stayed with her to the end.

JOHN NYSTUEN

(1931-2022)

John David Nystuen, who with his wife Gwen had been a member of the CHAA since the 1980s, passed away in Ann Arbor on July 2. He was 91 years old and had been dealing with heart ailments. Gwen survives him, as does their daughter, Leslie Nystuen, a pediatrician (and *Repast* subscriber) in Cambridge, MA. Their son, Jeffrey, an oceanographer in the Seattle area, died in 2020.

Dr. Nystuen had retired in May 2000 as a Professor of Urban Geography and Planning at the Univ. of Michigan, where he started as an instructor in 1959. His specialties included spatial analysis and modern mathematical geography (in both of which he was a recognized pioneer), as well as hunger, nutrition, and health planning. His work spanned the globe, taking him to China, South and East Africa, Indonesia, Columbia, South and East Asia, Turkey, Nepal, and Mexico. Gwen, whom he married in California in 1955, also eventually worked for UM (including Information and Technology Services and other offices) and has served on the Ann Arbor Parks Advisory Commission.

John was born and raised in Northfield, MN, in a family with Norwegian heritage on his father's side; in fact, Nystuen is the name of a village in Norway. He earned A.B. and Ph.D. degrees from the Univ. of California at Berkeley and the Univ. of Washington in Seattle, respectively. In 1963, John and Gwen moved from the outlying Ann Arbor community of Pittsfield Village (built as World War 2 GI housing) to a house on Olivia Avenue in the mostly-faculty residential area just south of campus. They lived in that modest home for nearly six decades.

The Nystuens first met Dan and Jan Longone— who later founded the CHAA— in the 1960s, when Gwen and Jan were fellow Democratic Party activists and became friends. The Longones, the Nystuens, and a few other local couples formed Grand Crew, a private wine club. During each school year, the couples took turns hosting monthly meetings in their own homes, where they would blind-taste 6-8 wines of a single variety and score them. The group also sometimes traveled overseas together to taste wine and food. “Discrete Mathematics and Counting Derangements in Blind Wine Tastings” was a serious— but in a larger context, amusing— journal article that John and two department colleagues co-authored in 1995.

After the CHAA was formed in the 1980s, the Nystuens became leading members who often assisted with the newsletter, meetings, refreshments, or other needs of the organization. John spoke to the group about “New World Grains” on Oct 15, 1989. At every CHAA participatory theme meal, it was guaranteed that the two would bring an authentic and wonderful dish— they were knowledgeable about seemingly every cuisine on the planet. They even hosted a grand 80th birthday celebration for Jan Longone in 2013. ■



John Nystuen outside the office of the Institute of Mathematical Geography (IMaGe) in 1991.

PERSIMMON

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Today, most states have amateur organizations such as the Michigan Nut and Fruit Growers Association. These organizations are full of backyard hobbyists and small-scale orchardists who trial-grow tree selections in the region, and who meet regularly to trade scion wood (twigs or shoots used to propagate a plant) and to exchange information.

Using and Preserving the Fruit

While there are a few herbalists who still have interest in the American persimmon for its bark and roots, most people prize the tree for the fruit. A good persimmon is like candy, or even more, like a gooey date. It will always be difficult to improve upon the simple delight of eating a perfectly ripe persimmon, but even a single mature tree is going to produce more fruit than a family can eat at once. The simplest form of preservation is to freeze the fruits whole, simply dropping them into a freezer container. You can thaw them and eat them out of hand easily for 8 months.

Many persimmon recipes call for pulp. The ripe fruit is quite soft, so it's easy to press the whole fruit as-is through a food mill or simply through a course screen to separate the pulp from the skin and seeds. The pulp can then be frozen for future use in recipes, or may be placed in jars and canned. Once you have the pulp, it can readily be incorporated into recipes in much the same way that you would use applesauce or mashed banana. Online sources will provide endless ideas for use of the pulp, from ice cream, jams, candies, cakes, and pies, to savory dishes. One of the most classic American dishes is persimmon pudding; on page 9, I have provided a typical recipe.

Today you can find numerous selections of the American persimmon plant in specialty nursery catalogs, and you can find enthusiasts across the country through the various fruit-growing organizations. I would encourage anyone to seek out this wonderful fruit, and to grow the tree if you have the space. The American persimmon tree has an amazing history and needs to be widely celebrated.

MORSELS & TIDBITS

Some readers might not be aware of **CHAA's Facebook** public group. Don't be shy: check out the latest postings, join the group, invite others to join, post your own information and thoughts, publicize the page via other social media, and step forward with your ideas as to new content and strategies that could be implemented there. To find us on Facebook, search for "Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor" or go to <https://www.facebook.com/groups/751034375622014>.

"Cazuelas y un recetario: Family Heirlooms" is a new two-year exhibit of culinary traditions and heirloom recipes from Mexican and Mexican American families. The exhibit is running Feb. 7, 2022 – Dec. 31, 2023 at the **LA Plaza Cocina** (<https://laplazacocina.org>) in Los Angeles, the first museum in the U.S. devoted to the history and culture of Mexican food. Another new exhibit there is "Legacy of Cacao" (Nov. 5, 2022 – Apr. 30, 2023), which celebrates the history and culture of chocolate from its origins in Mesoamerica to its trajectory around the world and back.

"Blacks in Culinary", a new commissioned painting at Zingerman's Roadhouse in Ann Arbor, MI, was created by Brooklyn-based artist **Patrick-Earl Barnes** to celebrate the contribution of Black American cooks, chefs, and writers over the centuries. It depicts 19th-Century cooks such as Malinda Russell, Abby Fisher, and Hercule Posey; 20th-Century entrepreneurs such as Leah Chase and Edna Lewis; and current scholars such as Jessica Harris, Adrian Miller, and Michael Twitty.

The **Southern Food & Beverage Museum**, SoFAB, which is based in New Orleans, has established a new, offsite SoFAB Research Center open to the public. It is located on the second floor of the Nunez Library on Nunez Community College's Chalmette campus in St. Bernard Parish. The partnership combines the museum's archive of more than 40,000 culinary books and thousands of menus and ephemera with the college's state-of-the-art library and archive facilities. The SoFAB collection and catalog can be viewed in person or online at both nunez.edu and SoFAB's website, <https://southernfood.org>.

The inaugural exhibit at the new center is "The First Settlement: Filipinos in Louisiana", running Oct. 1, 2022 – Oct. 2023. When the fishing village of St. Malo arose in St. Bernard Parish at least two centuries ago, it was the first permanent settlement of Filipinos in the U.S. The exhibit, a SoFAB partnership with the Philippines Consulate and the Philippine-Louisiana Historical Society, has seven sections: Story of St. Malo, Filipino Family Recipes, Shrimp Drying in Louisiana, History through the Products of the Philippines, Filipino Festivals & Food, Filipino Louisianan Garden, and Anatomy of a Dish.

Registered dietician and culinary teacher **Mary Miller** was the lead researcher for four new themed Culinary Trails that the Pennsylvania Tourism Office established this Fall, funded in part by the Appalachian Regional Commission. The trails are road trips that link together notable sites for people to visit and

learn about selected aspects of the state's agricultural history and traditional foodways. The four new themes focus on apples, breads, pickles, and charcuterie; they join two older trails about maple syrup and ice cream. For more information, see <https://www.visitpa.com/trips-and-trails>.

Peter G. Rose (Culinary Historians of New York) has been approaching descendants of Dutch settlers of New Netherland with a request to contact her if their families have manuscript cookbooks. As of early August, she had uncovered 39 such books in various archives in the former colony, which was comprised of NY, NJ, DE, and parts of MD, PA, and CT. Anyone who knows of such a book can contact Peter directly by e-mail at pgrose2006@yahoo.com.

The year 2022 marks the 75th anniversary of **Pepperidge Farm** opening its first modern bakery, in Norwalk, CT. There are several interesting aspects to the history of the firm, which bakes breads, Goldfish crackers, Milano cookies, and other goods.

In its first two decades the company sold just bread; it was only during a 1955 trip to Belgium—where she encountered lavish chocolate cookies made by Biscuits Delacre—that the founder, Margaret Rudkin, began to think that she could sell such fancy products in the U.S.

Rudkin, a stockbroker's wife living on a large farm in Fairfield, CT, had begun baking and selling loaves of whole-wheat bread from her kitchen oven in the 1930s to provide healthier food for her son and other local children, and to earn some cash during the Great Depression.

As the operation grew—in 1940 she moved it from her garage to a large repurposed building, and in 1947 to a modern factory—she bucked baking industry trends by hiring mainly women, as she valued their traditional ties to bread baking, and considered housework to be excellent preparation for running a business.

From 1952 to 1967 Rudkin contracted with the old Wayside Inn Grist Mill—which is situated beside the Boston Post Road in Sudbury, MA—to supply whole wheat flour, a total of about 9,000 tons during those years. The water-powered mill, featured in the Pepperidge Farm logo, had been built in 1929 by Henry Ford; the company had it restored in 2007, and it still gives historical demonstrations.

The Margaret Rudkin Pepperidge Farm Cookbook (1963), a bestseller now available via the Internet Archive (<https://archive.org/details/margaretrudkinpe00rudk>), includes some historical recipes going back to the 1400s. ■



CHAA CALENDAR

Except where noted, programs are scheduled for 4:00-5:30 p.m. Eastern U.S. Time, both in-person at the Downtown Ann Arbor District Library(343 S. Fifth Ave.) and streamed live on YouTube. For the latest information, check the CHAA homepage at <http://culinaryhistoriansann Arbor.org>.

Sunday, January 15, 2023

Online-only via Zoom and YouTube
Eric Pallant, amateur baker, author, and
Professor of Environmental Science
and Sustainability at Allegheny College,
“Sourdough Culture: A History of Breadmaking
from Ancient to Modern Bakers”

Sunday, February 19, 2023

Online-only via Zoom and YouTube
Kelley Fanto Deetz, Vice President of Collections
and Public Engagement, Stratford Hall, VA,
“Bound to the Fire: How Virginia’s Enslaved
Cooks Helped Invent American Cuisine”

Sunday, March 19, 2023

Lisa McDonald, owner of
TeaHaus in Ann Arbor, MI,
and co-author of
Tea for Dummies (forthcoming, Mar. 2023)

Sunday, April 16, 2023

Juli McCloone, Curator of Special Collections
Research Center, UM Library,
“Highlights from the Janice Bluestein Longone
Culinary Archives at the Univ. of Michigan”.

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.

- Winter 2023: Foods of the Ancient Roman World
- Spring 2023: Roots of American Foodways.

REPAST
1044 GREENHILLS DRIVE
ANN ARBOR, MI 48105-2722

Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

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