

CHoW Line

Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C.

November 2008

Volume XIII, Number 3

Renew Your Membership in CHoW by November 30 to be included in the Membership List!

Fill out a membership form and send it with your check to

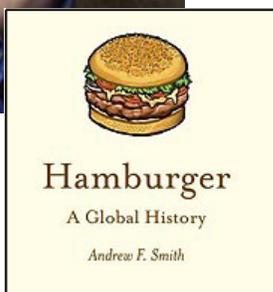
The membership year runs from September 1 to August 31. Annual dues are \$20 for an individual, household, or organization and \$10 for a student. Individual and household members are eligible to vote, hold office, and serve on committees.

CHoW/DC publishes *CHoW Line* nine times each year. More information can be found at www.chowdc.org.

Keep Those Refreshments Coming!

Please contact

if you have questions about bringing food or drink for any of our meetings.



“Hamburger: A Global History”

By Andrew F. Smith

Sunday, November 16, 2008

2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

(Note: Third Sunday)

While debunking “fakelore,” such as the burger’s rumored origins in Hamburg, Germany, culinary historian Andrew F. Smith charts the hamburger’s meteoric rise from an American street food to global stardom. Smith argues that the humble burger was key to the modernization of American life, from fast food’s replacement of home-cooked meals to the phenomenon of “McDonaldization.” The November 16 CHoW meeting will be the first presentation on Smith’s new book, *Hamburger: A Global History*. It is one of three books in the new “Edible Series” just launched by Reaktion Books.

Andrew F. Smith is a freelance writer and speaker on culinary matters. He teaches courses on culinary history, professional food writing and food studies at the New School in Manhattan, and serves as the Editor for the Edible Series at Reaktion Press in the United Kingdom. He has written more than three hundred articles in academic journals and popular (see **Hamburger**, *continued on page 5*)

Calendar of CHoW Meetings

- September 14** John Martin Taylor, “Food and History in the Carolina Lowcountry”
October 12 Bee Wilson, “Swindled: The Dark History of Food Fraud from Poisoned Candy to Counterfeit Coffee”
November 16 **Andrew Smith**, “Hamburger: A Global History” (Note: third Sunday)
December 14 “Festive Food” Panel composed of CHoW members who will speak about celebratory and symbolic foods from around the world.
January 11 CiCi Williamson, “The ZIP Codes of Our Food: A Quick History of Global Cuisines”
February 8 Michael Twitty, “Afro-Maryland Food Culture”
March 8 Patrick Evan-Hylton, “Wine in Virginia”
April 5 Cooperative Supper (Note: first Sunday and time change)
May 3 Ann Chandonnet, “How Argonauts Ate: Details from Gold Rush Diaries” (Note: first Sunday)

Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C. (CHoW/DC) founded in 1996, is an informal, nonprofit, educational organization dedicated to the study of the history of foodstuffs, cuisines, and culinary customs, both historical and contemporary, from all parts of the world.

www.chowdc.org

What Happened at the October 12 Meeting?

GENERAL MEETING MINUTES

President **Laura Gilliam** called the meeting to order at 2:40 p.m. Attendees introduced themselves and, if this was their first visit, told how they heard about CHoW/DC.

Announcements: We are trying to update upcoming community events in *CHoWLine* and on our www.chowdc.org Web site. If anyone knows of future food or culinary history events, call or e-mail **Laura Gilliam** or **Dianne Hennessy King** so the events can be included online and in the newsletter. In response to a call for a volunteer, **Francine Berkowitz** offered to handle the book arrangements for next month's speaker, Andrew F. Smith.

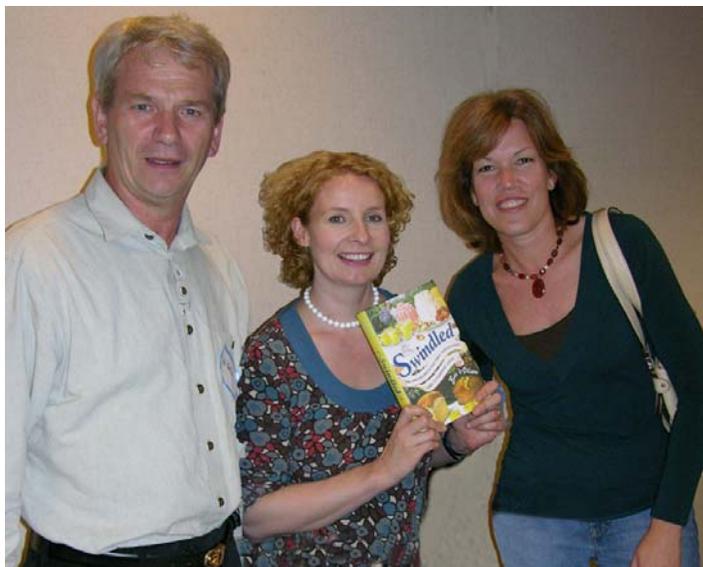
Whatzits: There were three whatzits this month: A hand-held metal ice crusher, a white plastic coffee tamper, and an implement to segment a grapefruit or an orange. Photos of them are included in this month's newsletter.

Refreshments: In keeping with this month's theme of food deception and adulteration, CHoW members shared foods that weren't always what they seemed:

- **Kathleen Carrington** brought Texas Caviar;
- **Katherine Livingston** brought Chinese-style Tofu served on Melamine;
- **Dianne Hennessy King** brought Guacamole made with green peas;
- **Clara Raju** brought Dal Patties (whole moong) and mint chutney, often served in place of meat;
- **Claudia Kousoulas** brought Poor Man's Caviar made with eggplant;
- **Laura Gilliam** brought Pringles that are made with salt on one side and flavor particles on the other side of each chip; and
- **Felice Caspar** brought Freckles, blonde brownies with the hidden ingredient of carrots to deceive children into eating a vegetable.

Program: Laura Gilliam introduced today's speaker, Bee Wilson. She is the author of *Swindled: The Dark History of Food Fraud, from Poisoned Candy to Counterfeit Coffee*. Her previous book is *The Hive: The Story of the Honeybee and Us*. She writes a weekly food column for London's *Sunday Telegraph* and is a former food critic for the *New Statesman*. She has been named Food Journalist of the Year by the Guild of Food Writers and Food Writer of the Year by BBC Radio4. She earned a PhD from Trinity College, Cambridge and was a Research Fellow in the History of Ideas at St. John's College, Cambridge.

Bee Wilson's subject is food fraud both in the past and in the present. She pays special attention to nineteenth century America and England and draws comparisons



Speaker Bee Wilson (center) with CHoW members Wilhelm Jonach and Kari Barrett. Photo by CiCi Williamson

with modern day food fraud. It is very apparent that the problem still exists, as seen in China and elsewhere. Food fraud is a current and old scandal. Swindling is a human activity and has been around a long time. Friedrich Christian (Frederick) Accum (1769-1838), a German chemist, wrote *A Treatise on Adulterations of Food, and Culinary Poisons* in 1820. In this small book, Accum complained that food was being tampered with frequently. He used the science of chemistry to expose adulteration. The consumer was powerless to prove that they had been swindled, but chemistry facilitated the process of exposing deceptions. Wilson recounted that Accum "opened our eyes at the risk of shutting our mouths." Food was being adulterated, people were getting sick and dying, and the government did nothing about it.

Another person who aided in exposing adulterated food was Arthur Hill Hassall (1817-94) who used the microscope to prove that food had been tampered with throughout London. Hassall's results caught the attention of Thomas Wakley (1795-1862). Wakley was the founder and editor of the medical paper, the *Lancet*, which gave Hassall's science the publicity it needed. Wakley published the names of the adulterators to expose them. In 1860, Britain passed the first law against adulteration.

One of the sneakier forms of swindling is trying to deceive our senses. Wilson used saffron as an example. In the 14th century, saffron was so adulterated because of its cost—and this practice still exists today. One example Wilson gave was of her going to a restaurant in England that offered dishes such as risotto and paella with saffron, a restaurant she knows was deceiving the public by using the less expensive turmeric in place of the costly saffron.

The International Commission on Ethnological Food Research

Note from the Editor: We asked Shirley Cherkasky to write a report on the Oslo Conference where she presented her paper, "Setting a Place at the Table for Food in the American Museum."

People often cannot tell the difference. Adulteration flourishes in places where people have lost the sense of real taste. If one has never tasted real saffron, how are they able to detect if it is adulterated? Wilson passed around samples of turmeric vs. saffron, cinnamon vs. cassia, and basmati rice vs. two other rices to test the audience's ability to discern the differences in the often substituted ingredients.

Since 1860, numerous laws have been passed to ensure that the consumer is getting safe food. But these laws have not necessarily deterred swindlers, as seen in the case of milk in China. This battle is an ongoing one. Perhaps one way to combat adulteration is to return to "a garden of ones own." But this is not workable for many, especially those in urban areas. Another way to attack adulteration is under the banner of safety. The downside of this is that good food is sometimes condemned. There is plenty of "fake" food that is good to eat and that won't harm our health. Zero tolerance for food adulteration is also another way to fight this issue. The downside of advocating "pure food" is that it is harder to define what "pure food" is, and, does it even exist?

Policing our food supply is one of the oldest and most vital functions of the government. Wilson pointed out that while *Fast Food Nation* by Eric Schlosser is an important book, it lacks historical dimension. Dishonest and poisoned food is nothing new: It has been around a long time. The author Michael Pollan in his book, *In Defense of Food*, urges us to eat as our grandmothers ate. But this may not be such a great idea. If we look back in history, we realize that our grandmothers ate many adulterated items. One of the examples mentioned was rotten meat, and what was done to the meat to make it seem fresh and marketable.

Science is on both sides of this discussion. It contributes to the deception of food, but it also plays a major role in the detection of adulterated food. It is hard to come up with an accurate system to detect adulterated food. Even though labeling has helped the consumer, it is not enough. There are too many cases of false labeling. We need total transparency, but this has not been accomplished. Wilson summarized that the best way to fight adulteration is to: 1) buy fresh organic food 2) cook the food yourself and 3) most importantly, trust your own senses.

The presentation concluded with Bee Wilson answering many questions from CHoW members and signing copies of her book.

--Respectfully submitted by **Clara Raju**,
Recording Secretary.

Welcome, New Members!

Linda J. Adler and Steven C. Fischer
Interests: General and Hungarian
cooking and cookbooks

In mid-September I attended the 17th International Ethnological Food Research Conference in Oslo, Norway. Founded at the University of Lund, Sweden, in 1970, the group has met biannually in Europe since then, except for its 1989 meeting in Philadelphia. It is open to academics, independent scholars and others doing research in ethnology (anthropology), folklore, economics, history, sociology, and related fields who have a particular interest in the role played by food in human life. The language of the conference is English. At the meeting, which usually lasts for five days, papers are given on research related to a subject suggested by the host institution. Anyone planning to read a paper submits an abstract several months before. The paper is limited to a reading time of 20 minutes but after the meeting, the paper may be expanded somewhat before being submitted for inclusion in the publication of the proceedings.

Both the host institution and the theme are decided upon at the previous Conference two years earlier. The host institution is responsible for providing not only appropriate meeting places, and for the publication of the proceedings by the time of the next meeting, but also for interesting field trips and experiences involving local foods and food-related places. In recent years we have visited, among others, grain mills, salt flats, oyster farms, dairies and creameries, olive oil presses, and both large and small museums focused on some aspect of food.

After attending for the first time in 1989, I knew I would not want to miss any future meetings because the opportunities to hear interesting research reports and have unusual experiences were so rewarding. Most of those who attend regularly are European, but a few from the U.S. also are there each time, as well as one or two from Georgia, Russia, and Japan. Two years ago we met in Innsbruck, Austria, and Merano, Italy, and in years before that, in Dubrovnik, Croatia; in Basel and Vevey, Switzerland; in Ljubljana, Slovenia; in Umea and Frostviken, Sweden; in Cyprus; in Munich; and in Dublin and western Ireland. The 2010 meeting will be in Turku, Finland, in mid-August, and the subject will be "Everyday Food."

The theme this year was "Cultural Crossroads: intersections that imply meeting points, negotiations, and choices with regard to food, drink, and meals, historically and at the present time." Because the conference was hosted by the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History, also invited were "contributions that reflect on the role of museums as institutions with an obligation to conserve material and nonmaterial knowledge, including that concerning food, drink, and meals, and to transmit and present that knowledge to a wider community."

I will be happy to give further information to anyone interested, at CHoW meetings or by phone or e-mail. —**Shirley Cherkasky**

Whatzits

From Recent Meetings

For those of you new to CHoW, Whatzits are the culinary objects that members can bring to the meetings to be passed around and puzzled over. Sometimes the experts are stumped, but it is always fascinating to try to discover the purpose and history of these curious and mysterious articles.

-- Photos by Dianne Hennessey King and CiCi Williamson



Holder for Carving Leg of Lamb: from France



Whisk from Amish Market: from Pennsylvania



Coffee Tamper



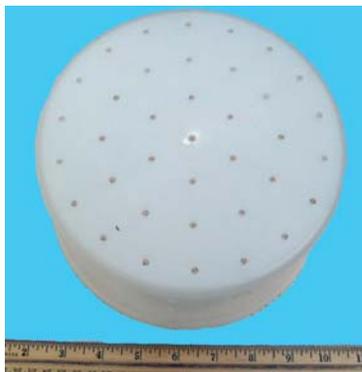
Decorative Stamp for Bread: from Uzbekistan



An implement to segment a grapefruit or an orange



Coconut Grater



Roquefort Cheese Strainer: from France



Manual Ice Crusher

Book Review

The Iraqi Family Cookbook: From Mosul to America

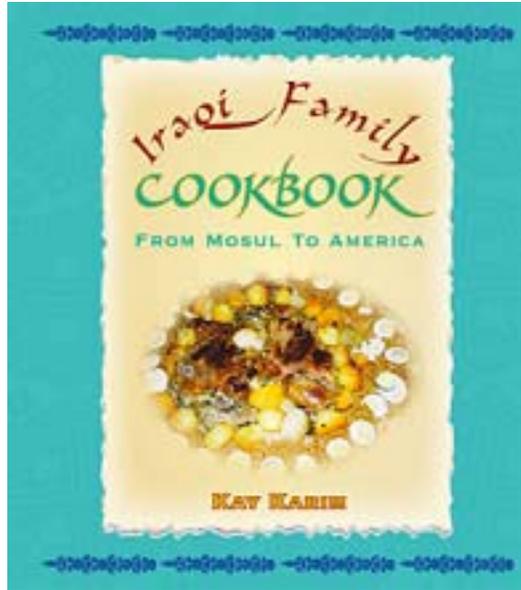
By Kay Karim

Reviewed by Dianne Hennessy King

Winner of the 2007 Gourmand World Cookbook Award in the category of Best in Arabic Cuisine, Iraq, this collection of over 80 recipes and 60 photos offers a window into the best of family cooking from a vibrant Iraqi cuisine. Author Kay Karim dedicated this book “to the loving memory of my mother who passed on her wisdom and cooking talent to her daughters...and to my sons and relatives who have encouraged me to pursue this project.”

Her dedication explains one of the many strengths of this book: Kay Karim decided to concentrate on the foods she knows best, the foods of her extended family who trace their roots to the northern city of Mosul, Iraq. Although members of the family moved to Baghdad in the 1940s and, later, places as far afield as France and the United States and elsewhere, it was the customs and food traditions of Mosul that they all tried to preserve.

According to Karim, “Mosul is one of the oldest cities in Northern Iraq and called al-Mausil. It is situated on the Tigris River and has been inhabited for 8000 years.” She mentions that “churches take youth groups to tour Mosul, its churches and monasteries.” As the daughter of a mother and father who were both school teachers in Iraq, Karim takes the time to include a couple pages explaining the Iraqi school system when she was growing up, as well as the role of the church in education. She intersperses recipes with additional information from Wedding Customs to Kitchen Tools, making this slim volume a lesson also on Iraqi culture and history.



While Karim was earning a degree from the College of Education in Baghdad, followed by two Masters degrees from San Jose State University and Old Dominion University, she was recording her family’s recipes that had passed down through generations, checking with her mother and two sisters for the traditional ways. Her sisters, Samar and Maysoon, prepared and photographed some of the dishes in the various chapters. All of the ingredients can be easily found in markets in any major city.

This reviewer has thoroughly enjoyed several of Karim’s selections: Bourek or Sanbousak (Meat Turnovers), Mukhalala (Pickled Turnips), and the wonderful Arabic Spice Mixture that flavors so many other dishes like Dolma (Yaprakh—Stuffed Vegetables). Other enjoyable choices are Muraba Mishmish (Apricot Jam), Dijaj Bil Batata (Chicken with Potatoes), and the lightest and best Baklawa I have eaten in a long time. The book is Karim’s gift to Americans and others who might be unfamiliar with Iraqi cuisine, but it is also her gift to the Iraqi people dispersed throughout the world who might risk losing touch with their ancient traditions.

Iraqi Family Cookbook, From Mosul to America
(Iraqi Family Cookbook, LLC, August 2006), 102 pages, spiral bound, \$16.95, ISBN-13: 978-1424308866, www.iraqifamilycookbook.com

Hamburger, *continued from page 1*)

magazines. He has authored or edited seventeen books, including the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America*, which was a James Beard finalist in 2005.

Smith has delivered more than fifteen hundred presentations and has frequently been interviewed in

newspapers, journals and magazines. He has been regularly interviewed on radio and appeared on several television shows on PBS, the History Channel, and the Food Network.

A complete bio is on his Web site: www.andrewsmith.com

Book Review

Sacred Food: Cooking for Spiritual Nourishment

By Elizabeth Luard

Reviewed by Claudia Kousoulas

Gilded coconut husks, a tower of pate a choux, slabs of pounded rice. Food is used by cultures around the world to mark the passage of seasons and the landmarks of life.

Luard's book, *Sacred Food*, records the details and traditions of discrete communities, but links them all in their responses to the universal instinct to celebrate spring as the earth returns to life, the joy and trepidation of entering into a marriage, the miracle of a birth, or the inevitable grief that comes with the end of life.

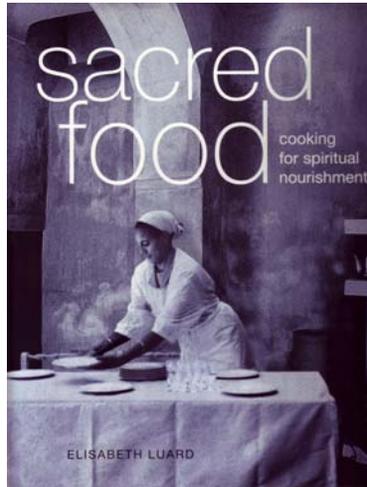
Each event has its ritual foods. From the golden coconut husks of a Tamil Sikh wedding to the pounded rice cakes, kagami mochi eaten to celebrate a harvest. Suddenly your chocolate Easter eggs or taste for apple pie when the mornings turn brisk, become part of a larger web of shared humanity.

Luard recognizes that many of life's fundamental passages have been overlaid with religious significance, but by showing the cultural connections, she emphasizes the universal joys and fears of humankind.

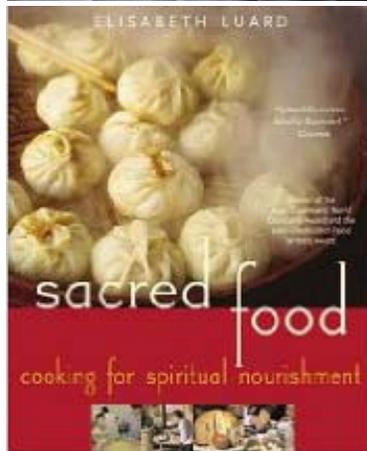
She breaks the book into chapters beginning with Fertility, Cultivation, and Harvest, through birth and initiation, onto courtship and marriage, and finishing with death, and continuing the cycle with resurrection.

In our modern world the primitive purpose of these celebrations, to propitiate the gods, has been "airbrushed out," but, she writes, the meaning remains a "ghost at the table." It is no accident that founders of organized religions grafted their ideas onto the basic roots of seasonal and animist celebrations.

And it is no surprise that even with local produce and traditions, cultures see the same symbolism in foodstuffs. Honey will mark the sweet things in life, thus the Arab sweets-baklavas and kunefe-that are part of the courtship ritual. Seeds, nuts, and eggs are the source of renewal and



HARD COVER



SOFT COVER

life, so Greek Easter breads are paved with sesame seeds and many cultures use eggs to mark rebirth, whether molded from chocolate or intricately painted.

Spilling blood is always a sacrifice and the ritual is indeed a faint ghost at western tables, where it lives on in Thanksgiving turkeys and Christmas roasts, though in Halal communities, the ritual, attention to detail, and priestly significance are more present.

Bread and salt are the building blocks of family and community, symbols of sustenance and savor. For many Jews, a challah "is the chief vehicle for the transmission of ancestral memory," writes Luard. Shaped into a ring, it symbolizes the cycle of life death, slashed like the rungs of a ladder it is a reminder of Jacob's ascent to heaven, shaping it into spreading bird wings places us under God's protection.

Of course, many of these symbols come with common sense survival. Salt and sugar are preservatives and bread can be used fresh or stale. Many dishes are timed to coincide with seasons; harvest festivals are the most obvious celebrations of bounty.

Through the examination of detail, in vivid pictures, and through recipes, Luard collects the traditions of the table that connect the human family.

Editor's Note: The book, *Sacred Food*, is a good reference resource for CHoW's December panel on "Festive and Symbolic Food."

Sacred Food: Cooking for Spiritual Nourishment,
By Elisabeth Luard (Chicago Review Press, 256
pages). Hard cover, October 2001, \$24.50, ISBN-13:
978-155652393; soft cover, April 2004, \$12 to \$17,
ISBN-13: 978-1556525308