

CHoW Line

Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C.

February 2008

Volume XII, Number 5

Cooperative Supper April 13

CHoW will be holding its annual Cooperative Supper on the top floor of an apartment building overlooking Alexandria on Sunday afternoon, April 13. See page 5 for ten suggestions of possible themes for our potluck.

Take a look at the list and see if one appeals to you -- or if you have another suggestion. We will vote on a theme at the February 10 CHoW meeting but we are open to other themes and discussion right up to the voting time.

Once we decide on a theme, everyone brings a "covered dish" to share that is somehow related to the theme. The dinners over the last ten years have been terrific and everyone has a good time dreaming up what to bring that will fit in with the theme.

In the past we have had "Foods of the Chesapeake Region," "White Foods," "Foods from Julia Child," and "Foods from the Silk Road," and "400 Years of Virginia Foods," among other topics.

FEBRUARY 10 MEETING, 2:30 - 4:30 p.m.

"If You Don't Want Grits, Why'd You Order Breakfast? Church Ladies as Custodians of Culture and Tradition."

By Brenda Rhodes Miller

Brenda Rhodes Miller has always loved listening to story tellers. "When I was a little girl it was clear to me that if I sat quietly when old ladies started talking, I'd learn all sorts



of interesting things." A non-profit executive director, Miller has written food focused newspaper and magazine articles as well as presented on such subjects as "Food and Family," "Preserving Family Traditions with Recipes," and "The Role of Hospitality in African American Culture."

With two published cookbooks and a novel to her credit, Miller is currently working on a murder mystery that expands the church lady franchise introduced by Penguin in *The Church Ladies Divine Desserts and Sweet Recollections*, and *The Church Ladies Celestial Suppers and Sensible Advice*. Random House/Harvest Moon published Miller's 2004 novel, *The Laying on of Hands*. She earned her graduate degree in Advertising from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana.

Calendar of CHoW Meetings

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| September 9 | Tyler Cowen , "Every Meal Counts: How and Why an Economist Became Obsessed with the Quest for the Perfect Meal" |
| October 14 | Stefanie Walker , "Bartolomeo Scappi's <i>Art of Cooking</i> (<i>Dell'arte del cucinare</i>) of 1570 and Italian cookbooks from the 16th-17th centuries" |
| November 11 | Amy Riolo , "Incense and Spice: Entertaining in the Arabian Peninsula" |
| December 9 | Mark McWilliams , "From Raw Beef to Freedom Fries: Haute Cuisine, the White House, and Presidential Politics" |
| January 13 | Professor Leni Sorensen , "Cooks and Slaves: Edith Fossett and Frances Hern of Monticello" (see page 2) |
| February 10 | Brenda Rhodes Miller , "If You Don't Want Grits, Why'd You Order Breakfast? Church Ladies as Custodians of Culture and Tradition." |
| March 9 | "African Foodways in Books and Art," A Field Trip to the Robbins Library at the National Museum of African Art |
| April 13 | Cooperative Supper |
| May 18 | TBA (Note: Not the second 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 December 9, 2007, Meeting?

NOTE: Because the December 2007 and January 2008 CHoW Line issues were combined, included in the February issue is the report on the December 9 meeting.

The meeting was called to order by **Randy Clarke**, Vice-President, at 2:40.

Announcements: The treasurer reminded everyone that memberships need to be renewed by November 30. Any memberships after the due date will not appear in the directory. There will be an addendum in the Spring of names of subscribers who renewed or became new members after November 30.

President **Laura Gilliam** reviewed the meeting policy in case of bad weather. The building is open no matter what, but meetings will be canceled in case of bad weather. E-mails announcing any cancellation will go out to members as soon as possible the evening before or the morning of a meeting date. People also can call or e-mail board members for information.

Refreshments:

Phyllis Krochmal brought Bailey's Irish Cream Cake;

Sue Latini brought "Grandma's Tea Cakes" from At the Hearth;

Clara Raju brought Nanaimo Bars;

Amy Riolo brought Date, Sesame and Almond Balls from her book *Arabian Delights*;

Tom Weiland brought Chocolate-Covered Cherries; and

Zina Pisarko brought potato chips because "potato chips were served to Krushchev, who had never encountered such delicacies before, and who went wild for them and hoped that Soviet Russia would start to produce them."

Whatzits:

Bryna Freyer brought in a silver spoon warmer that stumped everyone.



Zina Pisarko brought in various molds for cheese, butter and cookies.



Photographs were taken of several previous whatzits that people brought back in today. These photographs will be made available at our www.chowdc.org website.

CiCi Williamson brought in antique miniature cast iron cornstick pans that had been in her family for about 70 years. She wanted CHoW members' opinions: were they meant for baking tiny cornsticks or were they traveling salesman's "samples." (Program, continued on page 3)



Welcome, New Members!

Linda Benkin

Jennifer Moore Howe

Interests: Slow Food, original food, holistic eating for health

Bruce Reynolds

Interests: Antiquarian cookbooks and manuscript collecting

Richard Roepke

Interest: Cooking

Virginia Ann Ruskell

Doreen Thompson

Interest: African Diaspora

**“From Raw Beef to Freedom Fries:
Haute Cuisine, the White House, and
Presidential Politics”
By Professor Mark McWilliams**

Mark McWilliams writes about food and culture. An Associate Professor in the English Department of the United States Naval Academy, he specializes in the shifting portrayals of food in literature, particularly in the nineteenth-century United States, but he has also explored topics as diverse as fusion cuisine and the morality of bread. His work has appeared in numerous scholarly journals and in the proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery. He received his M.A. and Ph.D. in English Literature from the University of Virginia.



Professor McWilliams began his talk by bringing our attention to a recent cover story in *The New York Times*. The story described what Hillary Clinton and family had for breakfast: What the candidates are eating sometimes is getting more news coverage than the issues that the candidates stand for. The food that the various candidates ate at the Iowa State Fair also received much media attention.

Food creates connections: candidates try to reach out to people via the food that they eat. Eating local foods says, “I’m one of you. Vote for me.” Hence, at the state fair you will see candidates eating the regional foods of the area. Even though connections can be made, bad experiences can also be created which show that the connections are only visual. President Ford had such an experience when he ate a tamale without removing the outer husk wrapper.

Food and politics have had a long history. Food, particularly the “elitist” and foreign sounding “haute cuisine,” has been linked to Presidential politics. French fries were renamed Freedom Fries to show our disapproval of the French stand on the Iraq war. But even before that, other foods also went under a “re-naming” to show our separation from a country that is in disfavor with the American people. During World War II, sauerkraut was renamed “Freedom Cabbage.”

In 1793 Jefferson was said to be too friendly with French cuisine. The consensus in the country was that simple, wholesome food was more patriotic and that enjoying French food was being anti-patriotic. Americans wanted

Maryland Humanities Council

This program was made possible by the **Maryland Humanities Council**. The meeting was free and open to the public and the location was handicap accessible. Sign language interpretation was made available with a two-week advance notice.

the comforts and joy of foreign foods but were scared of the ramifications. In the late 1780s, what to eat became a political question. The association was made that eating simple “American” food reflected the values of the politician. The myth of Republican simplicity came about after the American Revolution. Food of the lower class became considered patriotic and reflected the virtues of the working class. An example was corn and how it became a patriotic virtue by cooking with it. Americans preference for corn showed the connection that we had with the land and our being self-sufficient.

Martin van Buren was seen as losing touch with the American people when he served a six course French meal in the White House. This was not the first time that a president had been criticized for serving French cuisine at an American state dinner. But the media focused on negative imagery and it stuck with the American people. In the next presidential election campaign, Van Buren’s opponent William Henry Harrison capitalized on this issue by presenting himself as a people’s candidate. He claimed to subsist on “raw beef without salt.” One can still question how much of this influenced the American people to elect Harrison over Van Buren.

The food prepared in Bill Clinton’s White House kitchen has also received much debate. When Clinton was first elected, Alice Waters wrote a letter to him urging the adoption of American cuisine. The letter urged him to focus on our environment and on organically grown food. During the Clinton administration, the menus at state dinners appeared in English and not in French. Hillary Clinton wanted food that was healthy and low fat. The chef at the time, Pierre Chambrin, left after one year because of his disagreement with the Clinton’s dietary choices. He was replaced by Walter Scheib, who focused on regional American cuisine. However, after George Bush entered the White House, Scheib was fired. Scheib categorized the food that the Bushes liked as “country club food”. His assistant, Cristeta Comerford, was hired as the next White House chef. She became the first woman chef in the White House.

Professor McWilliams ended his talk at 3:30 and then answered questions for the next 30 minutes.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:15
Respectfully submitted,
Clara Raju, Recording Secretary

What Happened at the January 13 Meeting?

Announcements: Treasurer Katherine Livingston's report: \$2246.00 in revenues (mostly dues), \$1400.24 in expenses (Chow Line, rent and miscellaneous). Balance in the bank is \$5140.52.

Refreshments:

Felice Caspar brought Applesauce Cake with Cognac;
Claudia Kousoulas brought Calcioni from Dolce Italiano;
Francine Berkowitz brought holiday cookies;
Katherine Livingston brought Macaroni and Cheese (a 21st-century adaptation of Jeffersonian dish, with Virginia ham);
Sophie Frederickson brought 18th-century Miche Bread with Coconut Oil;
Clara Raju brought Sweet Potato Bread from the African-American Heritage Cookbook by Caroly Quick Tillery and
Amy Riolo brought Sweet Mouthfuls & Pastry "Windows."

Program

"Cooks and Slaves: Edith Fossett and Frances Hern of Monticello" by Professor Leni Sorensen

The meeting was brought to order by Randy Clarke, Vice-President, at 2:50 PM. Randy introduced Dr. Leni Sorensen. She is a research historian at the Thomas Jefferson Foundation at Monticello. She received her Ph.D. from The College of William and Mary. Today's talk "Cooks and Slaves: Edith Fossett and Frances Hern of Monticello" will be on the last sixteen years of Thomas Jefferson's life at Monticello, where his enslaved cooks served food "half French, half Virginia, in good taste and abundance." From 1810 until his death in 1862 Thomas Jefferson was noted for serving a combination of French-Virginian cuisine of elegance and variety at Monticello. For this he relied on the skills and experience of his two enslaved cooks Edith Fossett and her sister-in-law Frances Hern.

During Jefferson's time, credit for the food that came out of the kitchen was given to the mistress or master of the plantation. The narratives in cookbooks and other books would mention the real cook as "black cook" or one of "African heritage." Names of cooks were never mentioned nor credited. It became fashionable to take part in the attitude of "benign indulgences." The Black cook was depicted in stereotypical ways (heavy-set woman wearing a bandana, usually behind the times of fashion) on cookie jars, bottles and other kitchen items. Cooks were often portrayed to be "instinctual" cooks who would never reveal their recipes. According to Professor Sorensen, this depiction of the enslaved cooks ignored the great amount of skill and learning that it took to prepare and present food for such a large number of family and guests. It was not unusual for the cook to send 30 dishes to the table. It took many virtues to be a cook: endurance, effort, diligence and timing, to name a few. Most cooks of that time were American born by many generations and many of them started working in the kitchens at young ages such as seven or eight years old.

The Hemings and the Fossetts were two slave families that held important positions on the Jefferson plantation for generations. Positions passed on from family member to family member. Women usually followed in the footsteps of their relatives and were trained for the kitchen. Recipes and kitchen skills were passed from one family member to another. James Hemings at the age of 19 accompanied Jefferson to Paris in 1784 to learn French cooking. He became a very accomplished chef. In 1793 Hemings made a bargain with Jefferson. If Jefferson would free him, he would teach his son Peter everything he learned about cooking, particularly French cooking.



Edith Fossett left for Washington at the beginning of Jefferson's presidency when she was fifteen years old. Both Edith Fossett and Frances Hern trained at the President's House for eight years under Jefferson's French chef. Edith became the head of the kitchen in Monticello and Frances assumed the assistant position. Edith and Frances had been trained at a young age to work in the kitchen. Early on they learned simple tasks like stirring pots, washing vegetables, carrying food and other mundane chores. They also learned other requirements such as being discreet and quiet, which were essential to run smoothly the Jefferson's kitchen. They were expected to feed important dignitaries and unexpected visitors at a moment's notice.

Members of the slave community kept gardens because it was considered a necessity if they wanted to stay healthy. Slaves would sell vegetables, chickens, eggs and other farm crops to Jefferson. He was willing to purchase these because it would encourage the slaves to grow the vegetables. Both Fossett and Hern had large families but still managed to run Jefferson's kitchen. They were able to create meals that required much planning and work. Jefferson's granddaughters kept the "keys" to the many rooms and cabinets that held supplies. When Jefferson died, Fossett and Hern were sold. Edith Fossett was eventually bought by her husband who was freed when Jefferson died. Peter eventually got his freedom and became a very successful caterer.

Leni Sorensen concluded her talk by discussing the plantation economy:

- Jefferson said that slaves couldn't raise pigs or tobacco because he couldn't tell what was their property or his.
- Jefferson believed that if you step on everyone's enterprise, then they won't do anything.
- Slaves didn't want a communal kitchen; they preferred to cook separately as a family.
- Slaves produced excess food (produce, eggs, chickens, for example) and Jefferson needed and purchased that excess. Ms. Sorensen then graciously answered numerous questions from the audience.

Cooperative Supper April 13

President Laura Gilliam discussed the Cooperative dinner which will be held in April this year. At the March meeting we will vote on a theme. Ed. Note: *this has been changed to taking a vote at February 10 meeting.*

Theme suggestions were taken from the audience:

1. The history of recipes from famous hotels, inns, and bed & breakfasts and how the recipes got their names (trite example, "Waldorf Salad" from the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, New York)
2. Good cooking in hard times - Depression era foods
3. Symbolic food i.e. Hot Cross buns, Chinese noodles for the New Year
4. Victorian Era foods
5. United Nations declared 2008 as The Year of the Potato. CHoW members could create a dinner with all of the dishes made with potatoes as an ingredient
6. Recipes from the White House and Presidents
7. Africa as concept - using foods that went from Africa to other places in the world
8. Marion Harland and her recipes
9. James Beard
10. Theme of foods with funny sounding names: Shoofly Pie, Bubble and Squeak



News From Other Organizations

The Southern Food and Beverage Museum (SoFAB) has a new online "Wiki" encyclopedia that is open to entries contributed by informed readers. A few of their subject areas are: Biographies of Southern chefs and writers, Information about farming, fishing, hunting and manufacturing, The influence of immigrants, and Information about native foods, people and animals. Go to www.southernfood.org to look at SoFAB's newsletter, Food Forum and Wiki.



News of Our Members

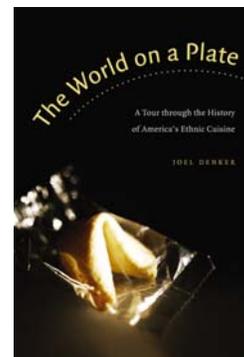
Our condolences go to Bruce Gaber on the death of his wife, Cathy Gaber. Both Cathy and Bruce have been enthusiastic and caring supporters of CHoW for several years. Cathy was elected to the Board of CHoW in the Spring of 2007. She later had to decline the position of Secretary due to health reasons. At Cathy's memorial service in January, the written copy of one of her favorite recipes that she made for friends and family was shared with all.

Cathy Jo's Spiced Nuts

- 1 cup sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 6 Tablespoons milk
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 cups walnuts

Combine and cook first four ingredients, and do not stir, to soft ball stage. Add vanilla and walnuts. Stir until mixture thickens. Turn onto wax paper, separate, and cool. ENJOY

Joel Denker's book, *The World On A Plate: A Tour Through The History of America's Ethnic Cuisine*, is now out in paper from University of Nebraska Press. It can be purchased from the Press at 1 (800) 755-1105 or online at www.NebraskaPress.unl.edu or through www.Amazon.com. Joel, a member since 1997, was a speaker at a CHoW program in 2003.



Sheilah Kaufman, Anne Parsons and Amy Riolo all contributed recipes from their recent books to be part of a fundraising calendar to aid The Capital Area Food Bank. The 2008 calendar, "Diversity: Think Globally. Eat Locally," combines a beautiful art work and a recipe for each month of the year. The funds raised by the sale of the calendars go for the great cause of combating hunger. Contact Zenith Gallery 202-783-2963 or www.zenithgallery.com and click on "Food Glorious Food 111" after clicking on "Press Releases" to find out how and where you can buy the calendar.

Upcoming Events

Peacock-Harper Culinary History Friends Group presents:

“Civil War Rations: A Test of Endurance”

Dr. James I. Robertson, Jr. with Chef Billie Raper
Friday, March 28, 2008, Noon
Holiday Inn University
900 Prices Fork Road, Blacksburg, VA
Cost: \$30 (tax & gratuity included, plus donation to Peacock-Harper Friends)

Dr. James I. Robertson, Jr. will present his lecture on the diets and food of common soldiers during the Civil War that he was scheduled to present at last year's Jamestown Symposium. He is the Alumni Distinguished Professor of History at Virginia Tech and executive director of the university's Virginia Center for Civil War Studies. See www.culinarycollection.org for more information. The same web address contains a book review by CHoW member Cynthia D. Bertelsen. The title of the book is *Food Culture in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Greenwood Press, Food Culture Around the World series, 2005) by Fran Osseo-Asare, also the author of *A Good Soup Attracts Chairs*.

The Spring Lecture Series at the Riversdale House Mansion

4811 Riverdale Rd.,
Riverdale Park, Md 20737
(301) 864-0420,
TTY (301) 454-4472



Tuesday, March 11, 7 p.m.
“Fighting Old Nep: The Food Culture of Enslaved Afro-Marylanders”
Michael Twitty, Director of Interpretation for the Menare Foundations. Fee: Free, made possible by a grant from the Maryland Humanities Council

Tuesday, March 18, 1 p.m.
“Julia Child: America's Favorite Chef”
The Riversdale Historical Society and Campus Club of the University of Maryland are co-hosting “Julia Child, America's Favorite Chef” at the Riversdale Mansion in Riverdale, Maryland. This play is a part of the Maryland Humanities Council “America by Food: Community Conversations” program. In this costumed living history presentation, Mary Ann Jung portrays Julia Child, the groundbreaking American woman who founded her own school of French cooking and co-authored the comprehensive cookbook classic, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. There is no admission fee, but reservations are required. RSVP Alice Tyler (301) 935-5279 or Barbara Glover (301) 927-4182 by March 11, 2008.
www.pgparcs.com/places/eleganthistoric/riversdale_events.html#events

Celebrating FOOD!

Cooking ★ Careers ★ Communications

The following CHoW members are speakers at Les Dames d'Escoffier Washington Chapter's upcoming seminar:

Shirley Cherkasky
Dianne Hennessy King
Lisa Cherkasky
Connie Hay
Sheilah Kaufman
Joan Nathan
Amy Riolo
Goody Solomon
CiCi Williamson



DATE: Saturday, March 8, 2008
TIME: 9:00 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.
PLACE: The Universities at Shady Grove,
Rockville, Maryland.
(I-270 Exit 6B. Directions will be mailed with tickets.)

More than 40 Speakers in 16 sessions!
Hands-on Cooking Classes!
Fabulous Food Product EXPO! with new products, samples, cookbooks and experts!
Breakfast and Lunch Included
Festival of Desserts
“Dueling Dames” Chefs Demo
Much more...

FEATURING KEYNOTE SPEAKER
Nathalie Dupree
Charleston, South Carolina

Topic: “From Shrimp and Grits to New Southern Cooking: The Changing Cuisine of America's South”

SEMINAR COST:
\$90 before February 29.
\$105 after February 29.
\$30 Champagne Workshop (optional).
\$35 for students with valid ID

For more info, contact CiCi Williamson
ciciwmson@aol.com or 703-533-0066.



Celebrating Food! is co-sponsored by the Washington D.C. Chapter of Les Dames d'Escoffier International, The Hotel Restaurant Management Program at University of Maryland Eastern Shore, and The Universities at Shady Grove.

BOOK REVIEW

Kitchen Literacy

By Ann Vileisis
Island Press, 2008
\$26.95, cloth
344 pages

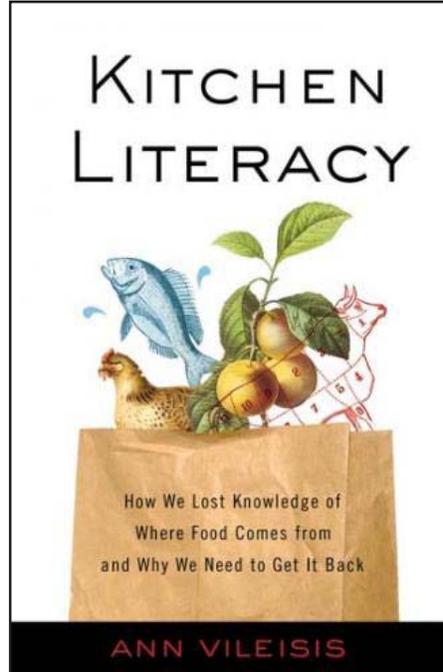
Reviewed by
Claudia Kousoulas

It is Ann Vileisis' contention that a "basic ignorance of food has become the norm in our culture." That is a position that some might regard as an ideal to aspire to - an everyday luxury of time not spent hunting and gathering or preparing and preserving - time that can be spent to develop a broader culture of arts and industry.

The gap between farms and kitchens has been well covered in the popular media; it's practically become a journalistic obsession, but Vileisis focuses on the interaction of American's mental habits and economics to trace a growing indifference to the source and nature of our food. To further explain the attitude of indifference, she calls on Claude Levi-Strauss who notes that what appeals to us mentally changes as our culture changes. So spotted apples, sausages that carry a barnyard tang, and cheese that lives and breathes were once the standard, then became unsanitary and strange, and have now become both virtuous and exclusive.

Vileisis begins by following the day of Martha Ballard, a Maine farmwoman of the 1790s, whose diaries were well-mined for the popular history, *A Midwife's Tale*. As well as tracing her work in the larger community, Ballard's diaries record the minutiae of daily life, including the details of producing daily meals. Her garden was central to the family economy, as were her family's connections to neighbors. From this web of connections, which Vileisis describes as a "foodshed," that stretched from Ballard's own garden to her neighbor's farm whose produce she would exchange through barter, Ballard could create a dinner of "bakt lamb, sallets," and "brown and flower bread." The reader can hardly resist drawing their own mental foodshed that, by contrast, is more likely to stretch around the world.

As America industrialized and urbanized, it became less necessary and less appealing to know where your food



came from, graphically displayed in books such as *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair. The Pure Food Law and quick admen, who developed jingles and imaginary spokeswomen, stepped in to replace folk wisdom as a source of trust and knowledge.

Vileisis goes on to explore markets and the further abstraction of food in a chapter on "Denaturing the Senses," in which she enters into the era of cans, labels, and margarine - food as a created rather than naturally produced product.

But as pendulums will swing, Vileisis records an early nostalgia for nature, citing Maud Howe Elliot in an 1892 *Ladies' Home Journal* article that described the "feverish city" in contrast to "the smell of clover" and the "taste of new milk." Vileisis also

describes the influence of immigrants on American foodways, not just by introducing foods like pizza that would later become all-American, but through social standards, growing urban gardens, hunting wildlife to the objection of zoological societies, and starting truck gardens.

But regardless of nostalgia and the standards of new communities, industrialized convenience gave rise to a "modern food sensibility." In her chapter, "The Covenant of Ignorance," Vileisis traces how supermarkets changed production by demanding mass quantities of reliably delivered foods, changed the pattern of communities that rescaled to accommodate large retail stores, and changed the sense of where and how one should spend household time and effort.

Naturally, the pendulum swings back to a desire for knowledge and the palpable presence of nature, at least among some consumers. Vileisis quotes Philip Wylie writing in *The Atlantic* in 1954, that "science had spoiled" supper. Whether driven by a fear of science or a desire for flavor, America's food culture, what we find mentally appealing is shifting again, back to spotted apples and stinking cheese.

Vileisis finishes by calling for expanding this return to knowledge among a broader number of consumers, to "encompass awareness that what we eat is linked to real people and real places."