

# CHOW line

Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C.

March 2011

Volume XV, Number 6

## Inclement Weather Advisory

If there's a question about whether the weather will cause a cancellation of a CHoW meeting, first check your e-mail. A CHoW-DC Google group message will be e-mailed to members.

If you do not have e-mail, call any Board member to learn of possible program cancellations due to weather (see page 8 for contact information).

Any decision to cancel would be made the night before, if possible, or no later than 10 a.m. on the day of the meeting.

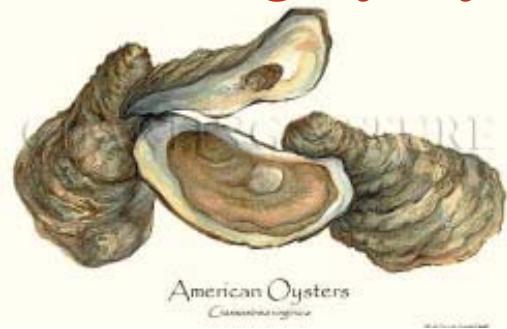


CHoW sincerely thanks the Maryland Humanities Council for making available John Wennersten to speak.

The Maryland Humanities Council stimulates and promotes informed dialogue and civic engagement on issues critical to Marylanders.



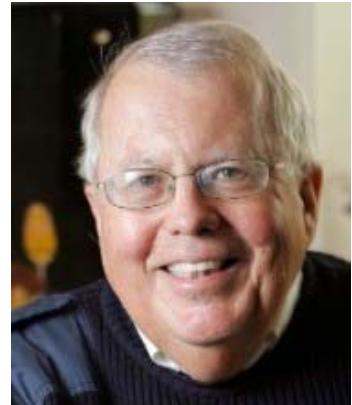
## *The Almighty Oyster: Food, Fighting and Sensibility*



John R. Wennersten, Ph. D.

Sunday, March 13, 2011  
2:30 to 4:30 p.m.

Bethesda-Chevy Chase Services Center,  
4805 Edgemore Lane, Bethesda, MD

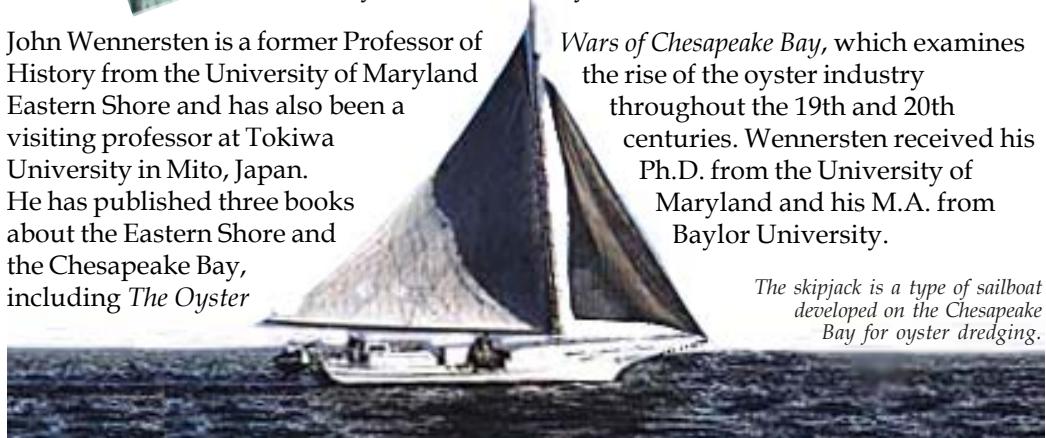


John Wennersten details the rise of the oyster from a poor people's food to a status delicacy. His presentation traces the evolution of the oyster industry in Maryland from the Colonial period to the mid-20th century. As the desirability of oysters rose, deadly violence broke out among watermen over access to the oyster beds in the Chesapeake Bay, Tangier Sound, and the tributary rivers, leading to the notorious "Oyster Wars." Tragically, its national and international popularity led to over-harvesting and the demise of what had once been called the Almighty Oyster. The audience will consider how humans use, sensibly or not, the bounty of our natural resources.

John Wennersten is a former Professor of History from the University of Maryland Eastern Shore and has also been a visiting professor at Tokiwa University in Mito, Japan. He has published three books about the Eastern Shore and the Chesapeake Bay, including *The Oyster*

*Wars of Chesapeake Bay*, which examines the rise of the oyster industry throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Wennersten received his Ph.D. from the University of Maryland and his M.A. from Baylor University.

*The skipjack is a type of sailboat developed on the Chesapeake Bay for oyster dredging.*



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](http://www.chowdc.org)

Dues to: Bruce Reynolds

# Upcoming Events

## CHoW Field Trip

### *U.S. Botanic Garden Guided Tour of Food Plants Conducted by Mary Chor*

Join other CHoW members for a tour of the U.S. Botanic Garden Conservatory to see some of your favorite food plants in action. Be introduced to some of the exotic epicurean specialties in the USBG collection.



- **When:** Saturday, March 5, 10:30-11:30 a.m.  
(Meet in the Garden Court)
- **Where:** U.S. Botanic Garden Conservatory  
100 Maryland Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20001  
202-225-8333  
[www.usbg.gov](http://www.usbg.gov)
- **Cost:** FREE (pre-registration required)
- **Contact:** Shirley Cherkasky to register:  
[shircher@gmail.com](mailto:shircher@gmail.com).

**LEARN:** On the tour, you will find out how USBG staff members hand-pollinate the chocolate trees, why bananas don't have seeds, and where baby bananas come from. If you have wondered why vanilla is so expensive or what allspice, black pepper, and chili have in common (think "pimento"), your curiosity will be satisfied.

The tour will also look at some poison food plants like cassava and sago palm. Learn what indigenous people do to make them palatable or what fate awaits them if they don't.

Learn what plants you should eat to combat indigestion, benign enlarged prostate, or diabetes. And if you are lucky, you may even get to harvest your own papaya, green tea, stevia, or loquat if conditions are right. The living collection of the USBG is always changing so come and be pleasantly surprised. The building opens at 10:00 a.m. if you want to arrive before the tour begins.

#### **GETTING THERE**

**PARKING** is extremely limited. Metered parking spaces are available within a few blocks of the USBG south of Independence Ave. SW. In addition, several spaces at the Conservatory are designated for handicapped parking.

**METRO:** Take the Blue or Orange line to Federal Center SW. Walk north up 3rd Ave. SW. Cross Independence Ave. SW and the USBG will be on your right.

## *Sunday CHoW Meetings*

**April 10.** 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Cooperative Supper, Alexandria, VA. Theme to be decided by membership vote.

**May 1.** Bryna Freyer, Curator, National Museum of African Art. "Foodways Popularized by U.S. World's Fairs 1876-1904."

## **CHoW Cooperative Supper April 10**

Suggestions for topics for the Cooperative Supper will be taken at the February meeting. We will send out the list to all CHoW members via the listserv in February. Voting for the theme will be at the March meeting. Some of our previous potlucks have been "Presidential Food," "White Foods," "Good Food for Bad Times," "Foods of Virginia," and "Indigenous Pre-contact New World Foods."

The Cooperative Supper is an informal meal hosted by Shirley Cherkasky in an Old Town community room overlooking the Alexandria skyline. Everyone brings a dish related to the chosen topic and is prepared to talk a minute or two about the dish and its connection to the theme. For non-cooks, there is always the option of bringing libations or purchased food.

A couple of suggestions already received are "Foods of the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War" and "Dishes Named for Famous People."

## **Nowruz, Persian New Year**

### **Sunday, March 20**

Persian New Year and the first day of spring occur at the vernal equinox, the Solar *Hejri*. The spring festival lasts 13 days and, as in many other cultures, the celebration includes showcasing foods and other items that have a special symbolic value, much like what we saw in the article on Chinese New Year in the February issue of *CHoWLine*. A ceremonial table (*Haft-seen*) contains seven special items whose Persian names begin with the letter "s": *sabzeh* (wheat or lentil sprouts), *seeb* (apples), *seer* (garlic), *sekeh* (coins), *senjed* (jujube fruit), *somagh* (sumac), *sonbol* (hyacinth). The last day of the festival is often marked by people going on picnics which you will observe in Washington-area parks. Some Persian restaurants also offer special Nowruz dinners.

## **Culinary Tour to Turkey**

Award-winning Madison, Wis., culinary-travel guidebook author Joan Peterson announces a culinary tour of Turkey, August 17-25. The tour includes food and wine activities, an optional balloon ride over Cappadocia, an exploration of the ruins of ancient civilizations along the Aegean, and visits to some of Turkey's historic landmarks. The cost is \$2,950 per person double occupancy not including airfare from the U.S. to Turkey. To view the complete itinerary, visit [www.eatsmartguides.com/tours.html](http://www.eatsmartguides.com/tours.html) For information and reservations contact Joan Peterson, Ginkgo Press, (608) 233-5488, [info@eatsmartguides.com](mailto:info@eatsmartguides.com)





## ALONG THE BYWAYS

*Musings of Members'  
Culinary Jaunts*

### *Kinklings, fastnachts or doughnuts:*

**Whatever you call them, they taste great in Frederick, Maryland!**

By Elisabetta Castleman

**C**all them *Kinklings* or call them *Fastnacht*; if you want to eat them, drive up to Frederick, Maryland. In the old days they were deep fried and served especially during Pre-Lent season; now you can order them and eat them every Saturday starting at 7 a.m. at the *Barbara Fritchie Restaurant*, located on West Patrick Street, up toward Gambrill State Park. Old folks of Frederick remember their mothers and grandmothers making the doughnuts dusted with confectioners sugar and serving them in what a number of somewhat ancient locals might still call a "Toot." Toot? Not the sound of the automobile horn but a local Germanic term that is used to indicate a paper bag; yes, from "*Tuete*" (English translation: paper bag).

It was when I first moved to Frederick in 1993 that I found out that Shrove Tuesday in Frederick was *Kinkling* time; later, during the Christian penitence and fasting time when Christ's death is being remembered, the fryers that fried those *Kinklings* or *Fastnachts* in lard were shut down.

Times have changed. Lard is overall taboo; vegetable oil is now used to fry these doughnuts. Strictly mandated religious food-related rules have also become a little more flexible. Now *Kinklings* in Frederick are either available every Saturday and Sunday at the place where I first discovered them or during the season that modern lovers celebrate Valentine's Day.

Frederick's *Kinklings*, also called *Fastnachts*, seem to vary in shape, ingredients, and name according to the cook's background or, let's say, his or her mother's or grandmother's tradition. They can be square, round, or long and twisted, made with or without potatoes or potato water in the dough, and with or without one or two cuts in the middle. Traditionally, for Catholics or Protestants, *Kinklings* were the last treat before Lent. The word *Kinkling* probably derived from the German term *kiechele*, or *kuechle*, or *kiechele* or *kiechelan* (American pronunciation: keek-hay-lay, cook-

lay, or cook-line) which meant a fried doughnut. *Fastnacht* is also easily translated from German into English: the night of fasting. Should you be one of those who either has memories of *Kinklings* or *Fastnachts* and has lost the recipe or who likes to try out old food recipes in danger of disappearing, here is one 1922 *Fastnacht* recipe you can use if you have the patience to follow the directions that call for a dough rising overnight.

### Pennsylvania-Maryland *Fastnacht* Recipe

2 to 3	potatoes, boiled in enough water to cover them
2	pints of flour
1	Fleischmann's yeast cake
	A little lukewarm water
1	pint of lukewarm milk
4	beaten eggs
1/2	cup melted butter or butter and lard mixed
1	cup sugar
	Enough hot fat to fry doughnuts

Mix flour, warm potato water, and warm mashed potatoes [probably peeled]. When the mixture is cool, add the yeast cake dissolved in the lukewarm water. Start this about 5 p.m. At bedtime, take a pint of flour and add it to one pint of lukewarm milk. Stir enough flour into this milk to make a batter that will drop readily from the spoon. To this batter add the first mixture [probably mix or knead] and let rise over night. In the morning add eggs, either butter or butter and lard mixed, and sugar. Knead stiff enough to roll; let rise until the dough doubles in size. Roll and cut out the dough and let rise again. When light, let "swim" [deep fry] in hot fat

From Mrs. T.J. O'Neil's instructions on how to make *Fastnachts*; a recipe compiled in the *Community Cookbook of the Committee of Ladies from the Library Association of Hanover, Pennsylvania*, published in 1922.



Where to eat *Fastnachts* in Frederick: at the *Barbara Fritchie Restaurant*, 1513 West Patrick Street, Frederick, MD; (301) 662-2500. Open every day from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. -- but remember, the *fastnachts* are available on Saturdays and Sundays.

[www.barbarafritchierestaurant.com](http://www.barbarafritchierestaurant.com). Go to [www.fredericktourism.com](http://www.fredericktourism.com) for suggestions of what else to do in the area while you are searching out your *fastnachts*.

**Elisabetta G. Castleman** is a German, Italian, English, and American cookbook translator and food writer. She is a native of the trilingual region of Trentino Alto Adige in Northern Italy and is now a resident of Frederick, Maryland.



# Culinary Humor

By Tom Weiland

Is it possible to be both historically accurate and funny in 350 words or less? That is my

monthly dilemma in *CHoWLine*, and I don't achieve it as well as desired. Go to a popular comedy club on Friday night and you won't hear many jokes footnoted, but find the correct historical context for a great joke and you risk turning it into a lead balloon. Humor and documentation don't blend well, like oil and vinegar, and it's hard to make them into literary mayonnaise. So I am turning to CHoW members for some help.

Can anybody help with some of these topics, or can you suggest additional topics?

- The history of the pie in the face
- Shakespearean food humor
- Translated food humor from the Middle East or Asia
- Popular folk expressions about food
- Funny toasts from other languages
- Food references from vaudeville, burlesque, slapstick, or stand-up comedy
- Funny names for cafeteria food
- Food humor in early sitcoms ("I Love Lucy," "Honeymooners," etc.)
- White House dinner gaffes

Send your comments, along with your own historical food humor, to my email address,

Just so we don't leave without a smile, let's take a quick look at Sam Levenson (1911-1980), an icon of the 1960s and '70s. Growing up poor and Jewish in Brooklyn, Levenson's humor mandatorily included food. Here are some of his childhood recollections from *Everything But Money* (1966), possibly the first book I ever read of my own volition:

- *I didn't know that meatballs were supposed to contain meat. To this day I don't like the taste of meatballs made of meat. They just don't taste like Mama's.*
- *Mama's ashamed to leave dirty dishes in the sink overnight. If a burglar broke in, she would be embarrassed.*
- *I didn't know that beds were supposed to be soft. To me "bed and board" meant one and the same thing.*
- *Mama believed in the survival of the fattest.*

Cheers! TW

## Nominating Committee for 2011-2012 Board Members

Dianne Hennessy King (chair) and Katy Hayes have agreed to serve on a nominating committee for next year's officers.

Per the by-laws, the committee will present its slate at the April meeting and will also ask for nominations from the floor. The election is in May.

There are three positions to be filled — President and Vice-President (both have reached their term limit) and Recording Secretary (the current secretary has decided not to continue serving on the Board because of other obligations).

Please volunteer or send a nomination to Dianne at

Although the number of Board officers is few, the tasks of the Board are many. We would welcome volunteers who, even if they are not interested in a Board position, would like to occasionally volunteer their time according to their own schedules.

## UNESCO adds traditional French and Mexican cuisine to list of the world's "Intangible Cultural Heritage"

On November 20, 2010 in Nairobi, Kenya, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)'s Convention of Intangible Cultural Heritage added 51 customs to its previous list of 178 cultural practices. Two of the chosen intangible cultural customs named are traditional **French and Mexican cuisines** which marks the first time food traditions have been added to the total since the list began in 2003.

A couple other cultural heritage customs added this year are **Spanish flamenco dance** and **China's Peking Opera**. The "Intangible Cultural Heritage" list, now 229 strong, started years after the UNESCO's "World Heritage Sites" list in 1972 that deals with places rather than customs. The UNESCO heritage committee named the French meal as "a customary social practice designed to celebrate the most important moments in the lives of individuals and groups."

The heritage committee noted that "traditional Mexican cuisine is a comprehensive cultural model comprising farming, ritual practices, age-old skills, culinary techniques and ancestral community customs and manners. It is made possible by collective participation in the entire traditional food chain: from planting and harvesting to cooking and eating." Go to UNESCO's website to see a list of all the 2010 entrants. You can click on the titles for the French and Mexican cuisines to see slideshows and videos about agriculture, food markets, meal preparation -- and enjoyment. [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)

# Book Review

## Casanova Actor, Lover, Priest and Spy

By Claudia Kousoulas

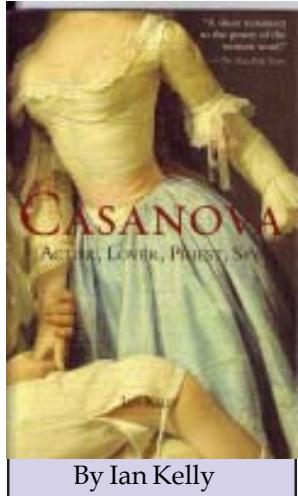
By going beyond what we think we know about Giacomo Casanova, Ian Kelly defines him as a thoroughly modern man, one unfettered by the limits of class or social hierarchy, who defines himself and pursues his talents.

One of Casanova's talents was as a gourmet and food writer. Kelly devotes a chapter to his food writings, excerpting references from Casanova's autobiography, *History of My Life*. Casanova's writings on food presage both M.F.K. Fisher's sensual approach of linking food to love and life, as well as contemporary historical approaches to foodways. As Kelly points out, an "inclusive approach to social history as well as a simple statement of personal interest." In his History, Casanova describes seduction settings in which food plays a part — recounting a kissing game heightened with briny oysters as well as the prevalence of polenta in Bohemia, the price of oysters in Rome and the orgeat and vodka served at the court of Catherine the Great.

Despite his attention to food, Kelly points out that Casanova was only a rudimentary cook, at most whipping up an omelet for a famished lover. But he could masterfully orchestrate a meal, working with a chef to oversee the menu and the setting to create a bit of theater, drawing on his own acting background, and moving from sustenance to poetry.

With his attention to setting and taste for scandal, one can almost imagine him challenging Martha Stewart, or at least Anthony Bourdain.

Claudia Kousoulas is an urban planner who also writes cookbook reviews.



By Ian Kelly  
Tarcher/Penguin,  
2011  
\$15.95, paper

## Cahuilla Indian Diet: Not Your Palm Springs Spa Cusine

By CiCi Williamson

While attending a conference in Palm Springs, Calif., I was fascinated to hear how the local Cahuilla Indians survived on desert foods. The lecturer, Nancy Cohee of Tall Grass Trading Company, explained how these original inhabitants of what is now Palm Springs (formerly named Agua Caliente) existed mainly on acorns and agave (ah-GAH-vay) — gathered in seasonal excursions — supplemented with deer, mountain sheep, small animals such as rabbits and rodents, mesquite, berries, and numerous other plant foods.

Basically hunter-gatherers, the Cahuilla were highly skilled at making coiled baskets from deer grass on a splint of juncus or sumac. Baskets were used when gathering, to store the food in their huts, and to hang it high from trees.



Agua Caliente Cultural Museum

### AGAVE

The Cahuilla prepared agave where it grew. They roasted it in 3-foot deep pits for several days. Some elders recall herbs being added in their favorite family recipe, others do not. The flavor of the sweet, meaty agave hearts is similar to baked yams and was much anticipated after the winter diet of stored acorn, mesquite, annual seeds, and piñon.

*Agave americana* (neither a cactus nor an aloe) is a treacherous plant with sharp, hard thorns at each leaf tip and in saw-toothed ridges on each leaf margin. The men used poles to remain well out of range of the thorns. After the leaves were removed, the creamy, satiny stalks — some the size of a woman's thigh — were ready for roasting. Four major parts of the agave (also called "century plant") are edible: the flowers, the leaves, the stalks, and the sap (called *aguamiel* — honey water).



### ACORNS

Men and older boys climbed oak trees and knocked down the good acorns with poles. After drying in the sun on bare ground or rock, they were carried in baskets back to the village. One carrying basket now in a museum could hold 100 pounds. Each Indian ate around 500 pounds of acorns yearly. Tan oak and black oak, the preferred species, both have large acorns, with significant tannins (insect repellent), low moisture, good nutrition and good quality flour when pounded. Gold cup oak was avoided, as it produced poor quality flour.

### SCREWBON MESQUITE

*Prosopis pubescens* is a species of flowering shrub or small tree in the pea family, *Fabaceae*, that has edible nutritious seedpods. High-protein mesquite meal is a Native American staple food.



### FOR FURTHER READING

Bean, Lowell John and Katherine Siva Saubel, *Temalpakh: Cahuilla Indian Knowledge and Usage of Plants*, 1972. Malki Museum Press, Morongo Indian Reservation.  
Nabhan, Gary Paul, *Gathering the Desert*, 1985, University of Arizona Press, Tucson.

## CHoW 2010-2011 Board of Directors

**President**  
Katherine Livingston

**Vice President**  
CiCi Williamson

**Recording Secretary**  
David Bender

**Membership Secretary**  
Quentin Looney

**Treasurer**  
Bruce Reynolds

**Director**  
Claudia Kousoulas

**Director**  
Katy Hayes

### Editorial Positions

**CHoW Line Editor**  
Dianne Hennessy King

**CHoW Line Designer**  
CiCi Williamson

**Website Coordinator**  
Katherine Livingston

## DIRECTIONS TO THE MEETING

CHoW/DC usually meets on the second Sunday of each month, September through May, from 2:30-4:30 p.m. at the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Services Center, 4805 Edgemoor Lane, Bethesda, Maryland.

**DIRECTIONS:** Bethesda-Chevy Chase Services Center is located at 4805 Edgemoor Lane in downtown Bethesda, Maryland, in the two-story County office building on the plaza level of the Metropolitan complex, above a County parking garage. The building is across the street from the Bethesda Metro station.

From the **Metro Station**, take the escalator from the bus bay to the plaza level, turn left, walk past the clock tower and across to the Metropolitan plaza using the pedestrian bridge. The Center's street entrance at 4805 Edgemoor Lane (corner of Old Georgetown and Edgemoor) is marked with American and Montgomery County flags. Take the elevator to Level Two for meeting rooms.

If you are coming **south on Old Georgetown Road** (from the Beltway use exit 36) turn right on Woodmont Avenue - the entrance is the second driveway on the left.

If you are coming **south on Wisconsin Avenue/Rockville Pike**, turn right onto Woodmont Avenue, go south for approximately one mile, cross over Old Georgetown Road, and the parking garage entrance is the second driveway on your left.

Coming **north on Wisconsin or west on Rt. 410**, take Old Georgetown Road north, turn left at the second traffic light (Woodmont Ave.) and the garage entrance will be on your left. Take the elevators from the parking garage to the plaza level (P). The building is located at the center of the plaza. The American flag, Montgomery County flag, and the County seal mark the entrance to the building.

**PARKING:** Parking is free on weekends in the county parking garage. The entrance to the parking garage is marked with a large blue Bethesda Center parking sign.

