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Repast

Quarterly Publication of the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

Welcome for Coffee

Finnish- and Scandinavian-
American Traditions of
Food and Hospitality



This *rulltårta* (Swedish cake roll), created and photographed by Kerstin Trowbridge of Grand Rapids, MI, is decorated with fresh fruit and whipped cream. The recipe accompanies Kerstin's article on Swedish coffee and hospitality (see page 3).

MORSELS & TIDBITS

“How We Used to Eat” was the title of a recent article in the University of Michigan’s *LS&A Magazine* (Fall 2009). The piece, written by well-known writer and UM alumnus **James Tobin**, focused on the Janice Bluestein Longone Culinary Archive at the UM’s William L. Clements Library, citing examples from the collection as evidence “that before the food-processing revolution, we had our own culture of real food.” Collection curator and CHAA founder **Jan Longone** commented in the article about several aspects of the historic American diet and lifestyle, including their healthfulness relative to those of today.

Jacqueline “JJ” Jacobson has been hired as Associate Curator of the culinary archive at the Clements, and Jan Longone remains Adjunct Curator there. JJ, who has a master’s degree in information science from the UM School of Information, came aboard this Fall and is already working on a forthcoming exhibit of historic cookie cutters. CHAA program chair Laura Gillis had a chance to meet with JJ, and reports that she is “knowledgeable, very enthusiastic, and really digging into her new position. I’m thrilled that we have someone to carry on the work, and carry it forward.”

A member of the Longone Archive’s Honorary Committee, well-known food historian **Andrew F. Smith**, has a new book out this Fall, *Eating History: Thirty Turning Points in the Making of American Cuisine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009; 392 pp, \$29.95 cloth). In a series of 30 essays, Smith explores key episodes that helped shape the modern American diet, such as the establishment of Delmonico’s Restaurant in New York, the building of the Erie Canal, the publication of Fannie Farmer’s cookbook, the advent of frozen seafood and TV dinners, the first supermarket, and the founding of the Culinary Institute of America. A sequel entitled *Drinking History* is already in progress.

Three different events relevant to the culinary history of the United Kingdom reach their 250th anniversaries in 2009:

- On December 31, 1759, **Arthur Guinness** signed the original lease for his brewery in Dublin, Ireland (see the article, “Guinness and Vernors: The Dublin Connection” in our last issue). That event also provides one of the excuses for CHAA’s planned theme meal this December, “Traditional Pub Food from the British Isles”.
- January 25, 1759 was the birthday of Scottish poet **Robert Burns**, who eventually composed “Address to the Haggis”. That poem provides an excuse for Caledonians worldwide to congregate on Burns Night (the poet’s birthday anniversary) every year to recite the lyric and to down a meal of haggis and whiskey. Burns also wrote the words to such airs-turned-pub-songs as “Auld Lang Syne”, “Tam O’Shanter”, “Comin’ Thro’ the Rye”, and “Green Grow the Rashes”.
- The British pottery firm **Josiah Wedgwood and Sons** was established on May 1, 1759 in the town of Burslem, in what would become the city of Stoke-on-Trent in the English Midlands. Thanks in part to royal favor, the firm soon emerged as England’s finest maker of china. In 1987 the company merged with Waterford Crystal to form Waterford Wedgwood, based in Ireland.



On the Back Burner: We invite ideas and submissions for these planned future theme-issues of *Repast*: Development of African-American Foodways (Winter 2010); Historical Stoves and Other Kitchen Equipment (Spring 2010). Suggestions for future themes are also welcome. ■

Repast

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SWEDISH COFFEE AND SEVEN KINDS OF COOKIES

by Kerstin Trowbridge

Born and educated in Sweden, Kerstin Trowbridge has lived in Grand Rapids, MI since 1967 with her husband George. They have two grown children. She teaches Swedish language and is a translator; serves on the board of the Swedish Council of America (an umbrella organization for around 300 Swedish associations in the U.S., Canada, and Sweden); and has served as President of the Swedish American Heritage Society of West Michigan. Her hobbies are cooking, baking, gardening, and reading. The Trowbridges have been friends of CHAA members Kay and Steve Oldstrom since the early 1970's, when Kay and Kerstin were involved in a Swedish Christmas program at the Grand Rapids Public Museum.

The Scandinavian countries top the world list when it comes to coffee consumption. Swedes don't drink quite as much as their neighbors these days, but coffee is still a very important beverage in Sweden. *Fika*, the coffee break with a sweet snack, is an important part of the workday in most places of business, both at mid-morning and in the afternoon.

Coffee was first imported to Sweden in the late 17th Century. The more widespread custom of drinking coffee came from Turkey via returning soldiers in King Charles XII's army. At first it was only a drink for special occasions in the upper classes. Later, coffee houses became popular, but during times of economic downturn, coffee imports would be forbidden and people urged to drink local beverages such as *aquavit*.

At the turn of the last century, coffee became the national drink and was served to children as well as adults. It was rationed during World War 2, and 4.5 million tons of not so tasty surrogate coffee were produced. Those Swedes who received care packages containing real coffee from their relatives in the U.S. were considered lucky. After all, a large percentage of Sweden's population had immigrated to America between the late 1800's and the 1930's.

Cafés were numerous in small and large cities from 1900 through the 1950's. Almost every café acquired a jukebox and became a gathering place. When the age of television came to Sweden, the popularity of cafés decreased until the 1980's, when a new café culture emerged.

Even though there are coffee shops that serve latte, espresso, and flavored coffees these days, ordinary strong coffee— and never decaf— is still the most popular. Some 73% of coffee drinkers drink their coffee at home. Swedish coffee roasters, such as Gevalia and Löfbergs, provide the preferred kinds of blends. But just as important are the baked goods that go with it.

SWEDISH CARDAMOM BREAD

- 1 cup butter
- 1½ cup milk
- ½ cup sugar
- 5 cups flour, divided (plus extra for baking)
- 4 tsp dry yeast
- 1 tsp ground cardamom
- 1 egg

For filling and topping: cinnamon, brown sugar, raisins, beaten egg, pearl sugar, or powdered sugar. (Pearl sugar can be found in specialty stores.)

Melt butter in saucepan, add milk and sugar and heat until warm, but not hot, to touch. Place half the flour in a bowl (or Kitchen Aid mixer), stir in dry yeast and cardamom. (For best flavor, crush cardamom seeds with mortar and pestle.) Add egg and warm liquid. Mix well.

Add rest of flour to make a dough that holds together, but is not too sticky. Knead well, place in bowl, and sprinkle with a little flour. Cover with a towel and let rise until doubled in size. Punch down, place on floured surface and divide in three parts.

For easy cinnamon rolls, roll out each third to a 13"x7" rectangle. Sprinkle with a thin layer of brown sugar and cinnamon and scatter raisins over. Roll up tightly from long side. Slice into 12 rolls and place each in paper-lined muffin tins or on greased baking sheet. Repeat with rest of dough. Let rolls rise until almost doubled in size.

Meanwhile, preheat oven to 425° F. Brush with beaten egg and sprinkle with pearl sugar. Bake for 7-8 minutes or until golden brown. Cool on rack under towel. If not using pearl sugar, ice lightly with powdered sugar icing when cool. Rolls freeze well.

Yield: 3 dozen rolls

The same dough can be used for coffee cakes or crescent rolls filled with almond paste or jam.

A Handbook for the Swedish Hostess

"Is there any other nation that enjoys coffee as much as we do", starts a chapter on how to arrange the perfect coffee party in a 1930 handbook for the Swedish hostess. Coffee parties in the homes were pretty formal affairs with lots of rules. Back then, and into the 1960's, they were social gatherings for women, who were mostly housewives at that time. The book gives instructions on how to issue invitations, how to set the table, and what to bake and serve along with the coffee. First, a filling coffee bread, then some type of sponge cake, then cookies and finally a special torte. A total of seven kinds were required at that time, but it was not uncommon to serve seven kinds of cookies in addition to the other things.

The baking turned into something of a competition between hostesses, and since 1945 the most popular and most sold cookbook in Sweden has been *Sju sorters kakor* (Seven kinds of cookies) featuring around 300 recipes for baked treats. New,

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EGG COFFEE AND THE SWEDISH-AMERICAN COFFEE SOCIAL

by Kathleen Timberlake

Kathleen Timberlake of Ann Arbor is a longtime CHAA member. Through a research grant from the University of Michigan, and accompanied by her Swedish-American former husband, she studied and compared folkways in the Swedish immigrant town of Lindsborg, Kansas and in Sweden itself, where she also traveled widely, including among reindeer-herding Lapp families in the far north. Kathleen spoke about traditional Swedish foodways at the February 2008 meeting of CHAA.

Before the current American fascination with all things coffee, before the arrival of Starbucks, the French Press, Melitta's filter system, Italy's Moka, the iconic 1960's glass and wood Chemex, Mr. Coffee, your mother's percolator (electric or stove top), the vacuum assembly, etc., there was simple cooked coffee. It survives today in a variety of forms— Greek or Turkish dense concoctions that are still preferred in the eastern Mediterranean kitchen, cowboy or camp coffee, and high-voltage spiced African or Latin American shots prepared stovetop in a saucepan.

The simple procedure of boiling water in a pot, adding fresh ground coffee to desired strength, and allowing the grounds to settle and brew describes the most fundamental and, no doubt, universal method of coffee preparation. Without the obvious benefit of an auxiliary filter that captures the grounds, preparation and cleanup can be tedious. Cooked coffee has always had to deal with sludge at the bottom of the vessel, keeping the grounds out of the brew and avoiding a bitter taste. Overcooked coffee is characteristically muddy and acidic.

Clarifying Coffee with Egg

It isn't clear when the practice of "clarifying" or "fining" was introduced, but it might have originated as a European culinary technique primarily to produce pristine jewel-like liquids or broths. A classic first course of consommé requires clearing the stock with a combination of egg white and ground beef, which collects the scum by-products. Dried fish skin, egg whites, crushed or ground egg shells, and a variety of sophisticated filters have been employed to achieve a balanced finish. The use of the fining ingredient in wine production functions not only to clarify but also to reduce the acid or astringent characteristics that accompany natural tannins in wine. The goal is to achieve a drink with no acrid taste overtones.

Since coffee has historically not been the least expensive part of Western food culture and was always subject to importation issues, it was especially important to maximize the experience of coffee drinking and not ruin it. It isn't clear who began cooking coffee with a clarifying agent; many individuals



A water tower in the Swedish-immigrant town of Stanton, Iowa is shaped like a coffee pot with a traditional Swedish decoration. Stanton is the hometown of Virginia Christine Kraft, the actress who played "Mrs. Olson" in a Folgers Coffee television ad campaign that ran from 1963 to 1985. Photo: www.roadsideamerica.com

of mostly northern and central European extraction have described the same method—the use of a raw egg slurry.

There are three variations on the egg coffee slurry recipe: beaten egg white, beaten whole egg and, lastly, the whole egg plus crushed egg shell. Each is mixed with a small amount of water and fresh coffee grounds until a muddy blend is formed. This is then added to a pot of boiling water, the grounds settle, and the coffee is ready. The real advantage of this method is that the coffee can be maintained on a very low heat setting and will stay fresh-tasting for hours. It gradually becomes stronger but not bitter.

Social Aspects of Coffee

The social aspect of drinking coffee has long played an important role in our culture, whether this form of caffeine functions as the fuel for café revolutionaries, students pulling an "all-nighter", or the vital stimulant for gossip at the klatch. Friends get together for coffee; frequently it establishes the first date, lubricates meetings, or is a significant part of labor-guaranteed work breaks.

In traditional Swedish-American settlements, coffee reigns supreme. The more rural agricultural communities, in particular, have maintained the twice-daily coffee break that originated in Sweden: 10 a.m. morning coffee (*morgonkaffe*) and 3 p.m. afternoon coffee (*eftermiddagskaffe*). In the Swedish-American towns of Lindsborg, Kansas and Kingsburg, California, the local cafés have tables where regulars participate in the daily ritual of coffee and conversation. Both Kingsburg and Stanton, Iowa have water towers built and decorated in the style of Swedish coffee pots (see photo above).

continued on next page

SWEDISH COFFEE *continued from page 3*

modernized editions have come out periodically, and about 3.4 million copies have been sold in Sweden. There are many second-, third-, and fourth-generation Swedish Americans who long for the familiar tastes of the baked goods they grew up with, so now it is also available in the United States under the title *Swedish Cakes and Cookies*.

For a long time, coffee bread was a treat for special occasions and holidays, as were certain cookies. This was when wheat flour and expensive imported spices such as cardamom, saffron, ginger, cloves, and cinnamon were used. Swedish coffee bread is traditionally flavored with cardamom, and cinnamon rolls are so important that they are celebrated each year on October 4, *Kanelbullens Dag* (Cinnamon Roll Day).

In December, saffron bread and rolls, seasoned with the world's most expensive spice, turn up everywhere. For Christmas, no home is without *Pepparkakor* (Ginger Snaps), and they should be baked at home, even if you have to buy the readymade dough at the grocery store. *Pepparkakor*, literally "pepper cookies", contain no pepper, but ginger, cinnamon, and cloves. Recipes date back to the 1600's. They were supposed to have medicinal properties, and it is still said that eating them improves your temper.

The three recipes I have given here are some of my favorites. Further good sources for Swedish recipes include:

- *Swedish Cakes and Cookies*, mentioned above, translated by Melody Favish
- *The Great Scandinavian Baking Book* by Beatrice A. Ojakangas
- "Favorite Recipes" by the Swedish American Heritage Society of West Michigan (www.sahswm.org). ■

RULLTÅRTA—SWEDISH CAKE ROLL

- 3 large eggs
- ¾ cup sugar (plus extra to sprinkle on cake)
- ¾ cup flour
- 1 tsp baking powder

1 cup fruit filling, such as applesauce or mashed sweetened berries

Preheat oven to 475° F. Prepare filling. Line a jellyroll pan with parchment paper. Grease lightly. Beat eggs and sugar until light and fluffy. Stir in flour mixed with baking powder until just blended. Spread batter in prepared pan. Bake for 5 minutes or until golden. Remove from oven and sprinkle top of cake with sugar. Turn cake upside down onto a sheet of waxed paper. Spread with filling at once and roll up lengthwise. Slice and serve plain or topped with whipped cream and fruit.

Yield: 12-15 slices

Variation (see photo on front page of this issue): After spreading the cake with fruit filling, cut into approximately 2-inch strips lengthwise. Roll the first strip tightly, and continue to wrap the remaining strips around this center. Place the finished round cake on a serving plate and cover sides and top with whipped cream. Decorate with fresh fruit or berries.

PEPPARKAKOR—SWEDISH GINGERSNAPS

- 1½ cups flour
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1½ tsp ginger
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ¼ tsp cloves
- ½ cup butter
- ¾ cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 Tbsp dark corn syrup

Sift together dry ingredients and set aside. Cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Gradually add well-beaten egg and corn syrup. Blend in dry ingredients in fourths, mixing thoroughly. Chill in refrigerator several hours.

Preheat oven to 375° F. Remove some of the chilled dough and place on lightly floured surface. Roll out to 1/16th-inch thickness. Cut with floured cookie cutters into various shapes. Place on parchment-lined cookie sheet and bake 6-8 minutes.

Yield: 7 dozen cookies

EGG COFFEE *continued from page 4*

The importance of the "coffee social" is most evident in the many Lutheran church events throughout the Midwest. Copious quantities are poured after Sunday worship, at meetings and suppers. This makes all the more difficult the task of keeping large pots* fresh and hot for the congregation. Consequently, the egg coffee method has endured as a solution that has proven so effective in these settings that it is commonly referred to as "church" coffee. Once prepared, the pots remain on low heat while sermons continue, choirs practice, and church members socialize. For many Swedish-American Lutherans, egg coffee endures as both an expression of their ethnic identity and religious heritage. It is a practical Old World solution still going strong in modern times in the American Midwest.

SWEDISH EGG COFFEE

(This recipe is for a medium-strength brew; adjust to taste)

- 1 egg slightly beaten
- 2/3 cup coffee (regular grind)
- 1/2 cup cold water
- 6 cups boiling water

In a small bowl, combine egg and coffee. Add cold water and blend well. (Optional: crush egg shell and drop into mixture.) Stir into boiling water in a large pot. Turn down heat and simmer for 3-4 minutes. Do not boil. Remove from heat, cover and set aside for 7-10 minutes. Pour in a little cold water to settle grounds, if necessary. Serve clear coffee off the top or strain through a fine mesh strainer into coffee server. Makes 8 coffee-cup servings. Note: a standard coffee cup holds 6 ounces

* Traditional graniteware coffee pots are available in a variety of sizes from Lehman's of Kidron, Ohio. Ph. 1-877-438-5346 or www.Lehmans.com.

NORWEGIAN LUTEFISK AND LEFSA

by Harriet Larson

CHAA member Harriet Larson is a retired schoolteacher who is intensely involved with books and libraries. During her career she taught at elementary and secondary schools in five different states, culminating at an elementary school in Livonia, MI, where she still lives. Her late husband John, a mechanical engineer, was born to Norwegian-immigrant parents in North Dakota. Harriet is very active with the Book Club of Detroit, the Friends of the Livonia Public Library, and the Friends of Michigan Libraries. She is also a member of the Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum (Decorah, IA), the largest and most comprehensive museum in the U.S. dedicated to a single immigrant group.

Lutefisk and lefsa? Yah sure— good basic foods for Norwegians transplanted from the icy fiords of Norway to the unbroken prairies of the American Midwest.

Lutefisk is dried salt cod, hung over racks and soaked in lye water. After several changes of water it is wrapped in coarse muslin and boiled to tenderness. It has the consistency of plain gelatin, with a viscous texture and little taste... but the “fragrance” of the boiled fish lingers on. Served with boiled potatoes and slathered in butter, it is endured at the holidays at Lutheran churches and Scandinavian clubs.

However, an enduring and palatable product can accompany this custom and that is *lefsa*. *Lefsa* is a fragile and tasty potato “tortilla” or “pancake”, thin and delicious with only butter and sugar. This most traditional bread is a labor of love and a skill readily attained by volunteering with a church group preparing for a holiday feast.

For the *lefsa*, potatoes are peeled, chunked and boiled in salted water and cooked until mealy. They are mashed with milk, salt and butter and then mixed with a hint of sugar. (We use milk, never the cream that some recipes call for.) More white flour is added to the mixture until it’s easily rolled. The dough-like mixture is pulled off into egg-sized pieces and rolled out on a floured board. When a 10”-12” disc is achieved, a *lefsa* rolling pin is used to give the disc a cross-hatch pattern. A circle about 9” across is cut with a pan lid. Excess scraps can be used in making the next *lefsa*.

My husband John’s mother would take the thin wooden lath out of a window shade to turn the toasting disc directly on the cast-iron stove. When the disc was brownish on one side, it was turned to the other side with the lath. When brown on both sides, the *lefsa* was placed on a tea towel on the kitchen table.

Stacks of these thin potato “pancakes”, crêpe-thin, were served with butter and sprinkled with sugar, or rolled up to eat with *lutefisk*, or else enjoyed with coffee. Coffee was served in a small sauce dish, a sugar cube was clutched in one’s front teeth, and the coffee was “jouldled” through the cube.

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Turning the lefsa while it toasts on a burner. Note the lefsa rolling pin in the foreground.

Photo:<http://archive.prairiepublic.org/features/ScandTraditions/lefse.htm>

EASY LEFSA

- 2 cups warm water
- 2 tsp. salt
- 2 tsp. sugar
- 2 Tsp. oil
- 2 cups instant-potato flakes
- 3 cups white flour

Add the salt, sugar, and oil to the warm water. Stir in potato flakes and 2 cups of the flour. Knead in the additional cup flour. Let rest one hour.

Break off egg-sized portions. More flour may be needed if the dough is sticky. Roll the dough on a floured board. Turn over and roll thinner to ¼”. (Optionally, roll with a *lefsa* rolling pin to make cross-hatch marks.) Cut into 9” disc using pan lid.

Bake in hot skillet until brown flecks appear on both sides. Remove to tea towel. When skillet is black, wipe with paper towels as you continue making the *lefsa*. When cool, stack and store in plastic bags.

Makes about 20.

FLATBRØD

- 1 cup sour milk
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. salt
- 2 tsp. caraway seeds (optional)
- 1 cup whole wheat flour
- 2 cups white flour

Mix together all ingredients except 1 cup of the white flour; then knead in the additional cup flour. Roll thin. Bake at 400° F. until crisp.

Allow to cool, then break into smaller pieces. Store in sealed container.

CHRISTMAS FOODS AMONG THE DANES

by Mariam Breed

New CHAA member Mariam Breed of Ann Arbor was born in Frederiksvaerk, Denmark, about 10 miles northeast of Copenhagen, to a Dutch-Danish father and an Afghani mother. She lived in Denmark until the age of 4, and continued spending Summers and holidays there with her grandparents for many years. From age 4 until her high-school graduation, she and her family lived in Casablanca, Morocco. After moving to the U.S., Mariam graduated from Eastern Michigan University, got married, and raised four sons. She works as an early-childhood educator, currently at the Jewish Community Center. Her mom, Mermone Van Deventer, wrote about the Afghani dish kichri quroot in our Summer 2005 issue.

Danish cooking represents a myriad of dishes in my life, but none as seemingly unchangeable as those on the Christmas menu. That makes them a logical choice to share with others on these pages.

Denmark has a long history rooted in farming, and modern ways have strayed very little when it comes to Christmas. Farm families were large, and farm hands were also considered part of the family, which added to the numbers seated around the table. A farm would always have pigs, cows, and geese; one goose was selected and pampered to yield the perfect Christmas dinner. Even now, the Christmas Eve dinner tends to be a close family affair, whereas friends are more often invited on the 25th itself or, even more likely, the 26th of December.

Christmas Eve, Course by Course

Before and sometimes after the Christmas Eve dinner, *gløgg* (mulled wine) is served. This warm concoction is made from wine, *solebaer saft* (the syrup of a dark-red berry, known in English as the blackcurrant), a stick of cinnamon, cloves, some cardamom, and sometimes orange slices or, depending on the recipe, grated orange rinds. (Oranges are actually the main fruit available around Christmas time in Denmark.) The concoction is warmed on a slow, low flame, giving the whole house a very special aroma.

In order, the first dish of this special meal is *risengrød*, or rice pudding. The original *raison d'être* of this dish was the need to literally fill the many farm stomachs before the festivities, as usually a farm could only afford to budget one goose for the occasion. The rice is cooked for hours in milk, with constant stirring, to turn it into a pudding, or *grød*. This pudding is traditionally served with an almond hidden in it, and the lucky person whose bowl contains the almond also gets some chocolate as an extra bonus.



A *kranskekage* (ring cake) decorated with Danish and Norwegian flags. The Norwegian word is *kranskekake*.

Photo: www.portlanddanes.org

In our family, *risengrød* has evolved from my great grandma's plain version to my mom adding a tablespoon of sugar and some cardamom. More recently we developed a milk-allergy-friendly version cooked in soymilk, which is delicious as is, no need to add sugar. When serving the rice pudding at Christmas one can also make— we have always done this— a decorative swirl on each bowlful with some red syrup. Grenadine was the easiest such syrup to find locally until Ikea moved in; we can now buy red berry syrup imported from Sweden.

I have just learned of an alternate way to make this pudding, or at least a reasonable facsimile of it, that is suitable for the busy cook. First boil the rice in water until the ends of the grains are almost transparent, then start the long milk-adding and -cooking process in a slow cooker or rice cooker. This removes most of the need for stirring.

Next after the *risengrød* comes the roast duck or goose— or for us in this country, turkey— in all its splendor. Stuffings, adapted to each family and generation, are varied. A prune stuffing is one of my favorites. It is very important to conserve all the meat drippings, juice and fat: the juice will be made into gravy, the fat, cooled down and made into a spread that will be used in place of butter for the next few meals.

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AMONG THE DANES *continued from page 7*

Served along with the roast are small boiled or steamed potatoes, with melted butter on the side, garnished with dill. The other traditional side dish is *rød kål* (“red cabbage”). To make this, the red cabbage is sliced into shreds, sautéed briefly with yellow onion, then cooked with a slight amount of water, a tad of vinegar and sugar, a chopped apple, and a few cloves. Besides these dishes, now that greens are available even in Winter, salads have been added to the Christmas menu. In our family, the salad is made with endive, nuts, and vinaigrette.

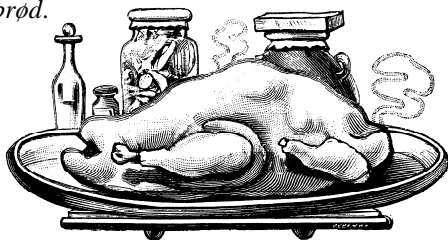
In my Danish experience, the dessert for a Christmas dinner is *kransekage* (“ring/ crown/ wreath cake”), a marzipan-filled cake having a zig-zag glaze made with confectioner’s sugar and water (see photo on previous page).

As a side note: Danish meal service is similar to the American (and different from the French) in that most of the food items are served on a single plate for each diner. The exceptions at the Danish meal are that the *risengrød* is eaten from a separate dish, as is the dessert.

The meal that I have just described is served hot on Christmas Eve. Around 6 p.m. the whole family— in their Sunday best, of course— gathers around the table, where the candles are lit. Dinner takes place, followed by dish washing, as Christmas or not, chores are orderly and important in Denmark to this day, and on the farm downright essential. After the dishes, the whole family gathers in the hallway, in the dark, as the father of the house goes ahead to the living room to light the candles on the tree. After the tree is lit the rest of the family enters singing Christmas songs, and viewing the decorated tree for the first time.

The following day, Christmas Day, lunch is very important. The dishes here are varied and incorporate leftovers. The latter are typically eaten cold on open-faced sandwiches made with thin, compact slices of *rugbrød* (rye bread). This will be the case for the next few lunches, and is somewhat the custom year-round. In fact, two Danish words often applied to lunch fare are *mellemader* (literally “between meals”) and *smørgesbrød* (referring to bread and butter).

The layout of the different lunch dishes and bread is, as always, very important. The sandwiches themselves are rather predictable: one layer of goose fat, one layer of goose meat, a thin slice of potato if some remain, and to top it off some red cabbage, making this the hardest to eat open-faced sandwich of the year, even with the customary use of silverware. Herring with raw onion rings is also on the menu, as are *leverpostej* (liver paté); *pølse* (sausage); curried eggs in mayonnaise; sliced hard-boiled eggs alternated with slices of tomato; shrimp in mayonnaise; *rulle pølse*, a thinly sliced *roulade* of darker and lighter meats, rectangularly shaped but with rounded corners, usually the perfect size and shape for half a slice of the *rugbrød*. Another important dish is leftover *frikadeller* (ground-meat patty), sliced cold and served on *rugbrød*.



Cheese and jams are also on the table, and all of the ingredients for such a feast are displayed in festive plates or bowls. Besides *rugbrød*, the bread basket might feature *knaekebrød*, a thin, crispy and light bread, I believe of Swedish origin; *franskbrød*, or “French bread”, in English this would be called white bread; and thinly sliced sourdough bread. For dessert, the unforgettable *risengrød*, with syrup, and without the almond, as it has already been claimed.

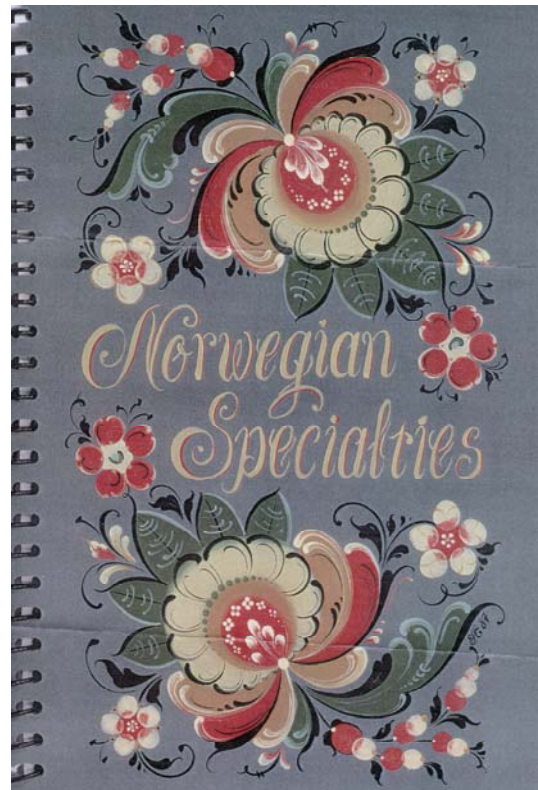
Schnapps from Ålborg, chilled in a freezer but still totally liquid, is served in ice-cold shot glasses. Beer, water, and milk are also served as beverages. The whole meal is followed by coffee for the grownups and hot cocoa for the children, served with unsweetened whipped cream on top.

This is a Christmas menu that has stood the centuries, in Denmark and in the countries where Danes and their children have moved, with small evolutions or minute variations on the theme. ■

NORWEGIAN *continued from page 6*

The *lutefisk* and *lefsa* were often accompanied by small side dishes of fruit *suppe*, which were dried Summer fruits boiled to a sauce, thickened with a bit of cornstarch, and sweetened to taste.

Printed on page 6 is my recipe for an easy adaptation of *lefsa* if you would like to try it. I’ve also provided my heavily requested recipe for Norwegian *flatbrød*.



Rosemal (a traditional type of Norwegian design) graces this divider page for *Norwegian Specialties* in *Rosemaler’s Recipes*, a collection of contributed recipes published in 1987 by the Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum (Decorah, IA).

AROUND THE FINNISH COFFEE TABLE

by Nancy Lempi Sannar

Longtime CHAA member Nancy Sannar, of Livonia, MI, grew up on a farm in a Finnish community in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Until she entered school she spoke Finnish exclusively. Later she earned a teaching degree at Western Michigan University, and spent her career teaching elementary school in Dearborn. Nancy's husband, Alton Sannar, who was also a CHAA member, passed away in 2002.

When I was growing up in the Upper Peninsula with first-generation Finnish parents, the afternoon coffee that occurred around 3:30 or 4 p.m. was an important part of the day in the Finnish home. My mother always had pastries on hand to serve with the coffee, whether it was just family or whether other visitors came by. In fact, whether visitors stopped by in morning, noon, or evening, they were always served coffee and pastries. There were also cookies or cakes, usually homemade but sometimes purchased.

Mother made *nisu* every other week. *Nisu* is a yeasted coffee bread flavored with cardamom. My job when young was to remove the hulls from the cardamom pods and pulverize the seeds inside. My mother always called the bread *nisu*, but the folks at the Finnish Center in Farmington Hills, MI, where I visit frequently, call it *pulla*. After any program at the center, refreshments are available for all at the coffee table, and *nisu* is sure to be one of the items.

Finland has a very high coffee consumption per capita. After the Second World War, my family sent many care packages to relatives in Finland. The one item each package included, in addition to any other items, was coffee.

On a recent trip to Ithaca, NY to attend a mini Finnfest at a hotel there, a room was set aside where attendees could drink coffee, eat goodies, and visit with one another from midmorning through evening. The refreshments were provided by attendees living in the area, and *nisu* was always available.

Upon reading about the coffee table practices in Finland, I found that the more formal coffee table for guests usually has seven items. The *nisu* is usually eaten first. Generally there is also a non-iced cake, similar to a pound cake, and other items such as cookies. A fancy cake is served last. It is often a layer cake that is frosted with fresh fruit and whipped cream. Guests must sample all items or the hostess will feel bad.

No wonder that, based on my experiences as a youth in the Finnish community, I have always felt the need to offer coffee or something to eat to guests coming to my home. Now it isn't always coffee, but something is offered. It is the Finnish way.



I offer here a Finnish recipe that I like to use as a dessert. I clipped the recipe out of a magazine more than 20 years ago. It is very similar to the oven pancake called *pannukakku* that is so popular with the Finnish, served for breakfast, lunch, or as a snack. They top it with syrup, jam, or fruit sauce.

I also like to cook from my copy of *The Finnish Cookbook* by Beatrice Ojakangas, a Finnish immigrant in Duluth, MN. The cookbook was first printed in 1964 and is found in many Finnish homes in America.

In some ways, Scandinavian culture seems to be thriving here locally. In November, the University of Michigan's Scandinavian Studies Program and its Residential College Players teamed up to organize the Signe Karlstrom Festival of Nordic Arts— three days of music, theater, and dance from Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland, at locations around Ann Arbor. After two of the concerts at the Kerrytown Concert House, they had after-glows with refreshments featuring Scandinavian foods— including *nisu*! ■

VARIATION ON PANNUKAKKU

- ½ cup butter
- ½ cup flour
- ½ tsp. salt
- 1 dash nutmeg
- 2 cups milk
- 4 eggs
- strawberries sugared
- confectioner's sugar
- whipped cream

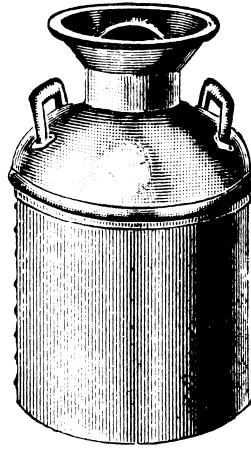
1. Butter two 9-inch layer-cake pans. Line with waxed paper. Butter the paper.
2. Melt butter in saucepan. Remove from heat. Blend in flour, salt, and nutmeg. Stir in milk. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly until mixture boils for one minute and is very thick. Allow to cool for 15 minutes.
3. Beat in eggs one at a time, until well blended. Pour into pans. Bake for 35 mins. at 400° F.
4. Loosen layers. Sprinkle sugar and strawberries between the two layers and on top.
5. Top with whipped cream. Cut and serve as you would a two-layer cake.

FINNISH AMERICAN MILK PRODUCTS IN THE NORTHWOODS



SQUEAK AND SLIME

by Yvonne R. Lockwood
and William G. Lockwood



Bill and Yvonne Lockwood of Grass Lake, MI are longtime CHAA members. For three decades they have carried out extensive field research, and have spoken and published widely, on regional and ethnic foodways in Eastern Europe and in the American Midwest. They were awarded the Sophie Coe Prize in Food History (2001) for their joint essay, "Continuity and Adaptation in Arab American Foodways". Dr. Yvonne Lockwood (née Hiipakka) was born and raised in the Ironwood, MI, area, where all of her grandparents had settled from Finland, and she spoke exclusively Finnish until grade school. She works at the Michigan State University Museum in East Lansing, where she is Curator of Folklife and Extension Specialist for the Michigan Traditional Arts Program. Her article on the Bay Port Fish Sandwich Festival appeared in Repast in Winter 2008. Dr. William Lockwood is Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at the University of Michigan. This article is adapted from a paper by the Lockwoods that appears in Harlan Walker, ed., Milk: Beyond the Dairy, Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 1999 (Totnes, UK: Prospect Books, 2000).

This article concerns two milk products and their roles in the lives of Finnish Americans in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan: *viili*, a type of clabbered milk, and *juusto*, a fresh cheese.

From the last decade of the 19th Century through the first decades of the 20th, Finns, as well as Italians, Poles, and South Slavs, immigrated to the Upper Peninsula in large numbers to work the mines. Many Finns, once they had established a foothold in America, purchased farms on marginal land left after loggers had cut away the trees, leaving stumps and debris. Some tried to survive by farming on these so-called stump farms (cf. Alanen; Gough). It was said that with 10 cows, one could make a living. However, many farmers had to work in mines and lumber mills several months a year to pay debts, leaving their wives to manage the agricultural work (Hoglund, p. 9). In other cases farms provided subsistence to supplement one's regular job in the mines or lumber industry. Even those who settled in the small mining towns of the area usually kept a garden and cow, supplemented by hunting and fishing. Many small-town Finnish American families kept a milk cow until the 1950's.

The majority of Michigan's Finnish population are now third-, fourth-, and fifth-generation Americans. Nearly 112,000

Finnish Americans live in Michigan (representing 17% of all Finnish Americans in the U.S., the largest portion of any state), the vast majority of them in the Upper Peninsula (*Finnish American Reporter*, Nov. 1993 and Mar. 2000). With the exception of the oldest generation, they do not speak Finnish, other than perhaps a few bits of vocabulary having special symbolic importance. Most of the food they cook and eat is Midwestern American. Perhaps the most distinctive foodstuff they call their own is the *pasty*, learned from Cornish immigrants who preceded them in the mines. This was diffused by Finnish Americans until it is today a specialty of the region (Lockwood and Lockwood 1991, 1983). The *pasty* became so much a part of the local diet that some Finnish Americans came to consider it of Finnish origin. But the community has also maintained a few dishes of genuine Finnish origin. Among the most important of these are *viili* and *juusto*.

In Finland, milk products are ubiquitous. After bread, milk and sour milk products are the most important staples in the Finnish national diet (Käkönen, p. viii). Dairy accounts for two-thirds of Finnish agricultural income, and the consumption of milk is almost 300 liters per person per year (Rajanen, p.104). A cursory survey of shops in Tampere, Finland showed eight different kinds of milk, ten different types of buttermilk, nine different types of *viili*, and too many kinds of yogurt to count (the majority with fruit or other additions). Both the emphasis on dairying and the high consumption of milk products are interesting, given that 17% of the Finnish national population is lactose intolerant, which is higher than for Europeans generally. For this reason, a good number of the milk products sold in Finnish markets are treated for lactase deficiency.¹ Most lactose intolerant adults can consume up to a pint of milk a day without serious repercussions. Moreover, they can eat cultured milk products because the fermenting bacteria used the lactose as fuel, so that the final product (cheese, yogurt, *viili*) is practically lactose free.

In the Finnish American communities of northern Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota—the largest density of Finnish Americans in the U.S.—milk and milk products seem to be more important in the diet than among non-Finnish Americans. Milk, sour cream, and butter are included in a great number of prepared dishes, e.g., in soups, stews, desserts, porridge, and breads (cf. Ojakangas; Käkönen; Kaplan, Hoover, Moore, pp. 144-162, 346-357; Larson). Many prefer to drink milk (sweet or buttermilk) with their meals, whether eating beef, fish, or soup, and in numerous homes, milk is served at every meal. Unlike in Finland, however, the choice of products treated for lactase deficiency is limited. Because this is a genetic condition, we can assume that the lactose intolerance rate among Finnish Americans is similar to that in Finland. *Viili*, as a cultured milk product, can be eaten freely even by those who are lactose intolerant.

Viili: The Elastic Yogurt

Viili is an ancient food and, like other fermented milk products, was a way of preserving milk for several days (cf. McGee, pp. 31-36). In Finland, *viili* is still made in homes and is also produced commercially and sold in groceries and markets. Whereas milk itself is not advertised, commercials

profile *viili* as a children's product with colorfully designed packaging to attract children. Mothers attest that *viili* quickly disappears when their children bring friends home. While considered especially appropriate for children, *viili* is also a popular adult snack food. Buttermilk commercials, on the other hand, target young single males and females who are independent, active, popular, and slim.

Joyce Koskenmaki describes how her grandmother makes *viili*:

Every morning she mixes one spoonful of *viili* with a cup of milk (whole milk is best, she says, and no more than a spoonful per cup), puts it up in the cupboard in a warm place in a covered bowl or jar and lets it sit—about eight to 24 hours depending on the weather. It takes longer in the winter, shorter in the summer. After it is solid it can be refrigerated for up to a week. (Koskenmaki)

It is widely believed that *viili* will separate in an electrical storm. When clabbered, it is chilled in the refrigerator before eating it with a spoon. *Viili* may also be whipped and drunk, which is more common in Finland than in the U.S. When *viili* is made with unhomogenized milk, the cream rises to the top giving a dual texture of a creamy crust, which is a favorite part, and a smooth filling. It is illegal to sell raw milk in Michigan, and milk that is only pasteurized and not homogenized is difficult to find. In southeast Michigan, for example, the most densely populated region of the state, only one dairy sells unhomogenized “creamline” milk. In more remote areas, it is not available commercially.

Some cookbook writers refer to a “long” and “short” *viili* (Käkönen, p. 187; Brown, p. 139). Finnish nationals and Finnish Americans regard “long” *viili* as the real thing. When a spoonful of long *viili* is lifted out of the bowl, it stretches. “At its best,” it is said, “the... *viili* should be so elastic... [it] requires cutting with scissors” (Brown, p. 139). One cookbook, in fact, describes it as “elastic yoghurt” (Tanttu, p. 24). It is this stringy, slippery texture that repulses some Finnish Americans (and many more non-Finns), and children compare it with snot. The other type is “short” *viili*—without any stretch and in texture much like yogurt. Ulla Käkönen, a Finnish American cookbook writer, makes short *viili* by using buttermilk as her starter, but the result, she says, is not as tasty as “long” *viili* (Käkönen, p. 187). In most opinions, this is not *viili*. While there are varying degrees of stretch, some believe that the elastic quality increases the more the *viili* starter is used. We suspect Käkönen's “short” *viili* to be a substitute for those isolated Finnish Americans without access to a *viili* starter.

Among Finnish Americans, *viili* is widely known as “feelia”, an Americanization of the name for this most Finnish of Finnish foods.² Most first-to-third-generation Finnish Americans love *viili*; they eat it as a snack or as a light meal, preferably with rye bread and butter and salted salmon. They usually eat it plain without sugar or fruit. Younger Finnish Americans (fourth and fifth generations) tend not to have this strong attachment to *viili*. Quite the contrary, many prefer yogurt, loaded with sugar and jam. While older generations talk about how much they like *viili* with descriptors such as enjoyable, flavorful, tasty—not flat tasting like yogurt—tingly, yummy, healthy, and refreshing, the younger ones

describe it as disgusting, the odor of vomit, slimy, snotty, and stringy. A third-generation woman provides a striking contrast to the fond descriptions of *viili*-lovers:

I think *viili* is something you need to acquire a taste for. I'm not nuts about it, but can eat it. It seems quite bland, almost bitter to me. I remember being kind of intrigued by the thick “skin” on top. This was the cream portion of the milk that separated as it was forming; it kind of looked sick to me. The part underneath was much thinner, kind of stringy almost and would plop off your spoon if you didn't get enough mass on your spoon to cause it to break [from the rest of the *viili*]. (Szyszkoski)

The origins of *viili* provide some of its mystique. One Finnish American asks, “how do those bacteria know they're Finnish and make *viili* and not French yogurt instead?” (FAR, Jan. 1996). Some believe that *viili* culture originated “by letting the milk set in a freshly killed calf's stomach” (Lassila). Today, however, it is believed that the butterwort plant was used in making the first *viili* culture (cf. Ränk; MacFarlane). The origin of *viili*, however, is not of primary importance to the community; one always makes *viili* with a little of a previous batch. What is important is that people who lose their starter, for whatever reason, know where to go for another or to one who can refer them to someone who should have it.

Individuals take pride in their starters. Some are handed down from grandmothers and are highly prized and carefully tended:

This *viili* was brought from Finland by my grandmother at the turn of the century. To transport it over the long sea journey, she spread it on handkerchiefs and let them dry, then wrapped it up and carried it with her. When she got to this country and again had access to cow's milk, she peeled the dried *viili* culture from her handkerchiefs and mixed it with the milk. This *viili* has been kept going for many years by her granddaughters.³ (Koskenmaki)

Other starters are valued because of their exceptionally good *viili* qualities, such as stretch and flavor. Because *viili* is not commercially available in the U.S., people depend on each other for a starter when needed.

Viili is a distinctive Finnish dish. Like the sauna, it is even regarded as having curative properties, as this testimony attests:

[*Viili*] is known to be beneficial to digestion, especially to those whose genetic make-up is Finnish. It is especially good for gallstones (a common Finnish ailment) and can neutralize gastric distress. [My cousin says] daily consumption of *viili* can make a person live longer. (Koskenmaki)

Another testimonial affirms this as a shared belief:

My husband loves *viili*. About 25 years ago, my mother died and my dad brought all her *viili* ready-made to my husband. He started eating it every day and it cured his stomach. He was eating a few rolls of Tums every day. (Berg)

continued on next page

MILK PRODUCTS *continued from page 11**Juusto*: Cheese from the Oven

Another Finnish favorite is *juusto* or *leipäjuusto*, a sweet-milk cheese clotted with rennet. Traditionally *juusto* is made from colostrums, the rich first milk of a cow that has calved; although rare today, this *juusto* is still regarded as the best. More commonly, commercial rennet is added to raw milk that is slightly warm. When the milk gels, it is sliced through, the whey poured off, and the milk placed into a colander or cheese cloth allowing the rest of the whey to drip away. On a baking sheet, the curd is formed into a large disk about one inch thick and put under a broiler or into a very hot oven for about 15 minutes on each side until it is lightly browned.

In western Finland, where this cheese originates and whence came many Finnish Americans, this cheese is called *leipäjuusto* (bread cheese) because it is baked. Like *viili*, *leipäjuusto* is available commercially today in groceries and markets in Finland. In restaurants it is a favorite dessert served with cloudberries. Most Finnish Americans know this cheese as “squeaky” cheese— so called because it squeaks when you bite into it— or as *juustoa*, derived from the word *juusto*.⁴

In 1985 the Michigan Department of Agriculture, in accordance with federal law, made it illegal to produce *juusto* to sell. Under federal law, cheese must either be made from pasteurized milk or, if from raw milk, be aged at least 60 days. *Juusto*, however, is made traditionally from raw milk and is often eaten warm from the oven. In 1989 a local Finnish American experimented with pasteurized milk, producing a cheese with the taste of cooked milk and a rubbery texture. Although clearly inferior, producers distribute this *juusto* through a local dairy and markets in the Upper Peninsula, and they ship to Finnish Americans around the country. Since then, others have attempted commercial production with limited success.

Despite the law, women with cows continue to make, give away, and sell *juusto*. Important social networks have developed about where to find it. With the steady decline in families with cows, however, fewer people are now making *juusto*. Nevertheless, in Finnish American communities everyone knows a cheesemaker or knows someone who knows one.

Juusto is central to traditional Finnish American life. Whereas *viili* is commonplace and eaten daily, *juusto* is considered a treat and eaten on special occasions. Unlike *viili*, seemingly everyone— young, old, Finn, or non-Finn— likes it. Cut into bite-sized pieces, it is commonly eaten as a snack and served with coffee. A traditional coffee table is laden with pastries, breads, sandwiches, cheeses, and *juusto*. Oldtimers put chunks of *juusto* “to warm” in their coffee.

Juusto also plays a role in ceremonial and ritual tradition. At Finnish ethnic events, wedding receptions, graduation parties, anniversary celebrations, and funeral feasts, the presence of *juusto* is almost *de rigueur*. On the occasion of his birthday, one teen requested *juusto* in lieu of a cake, and his grandmother happily complied. A memory from the past emphasizes the role of *juusto* at another ritual event:

Once my mother and I visited my grand aunt in Chassell. She was in the hospital, dying of cancer. She said, “Ida, you will bake a cheese, won’t you?” Mother said, “Yes.” When we left, I remember asking, “Does she think she will recover to enjoy the cheese?” Mother said, “She means for her funeral.” (Lampi)

Ethnic and Community Identity

Beyond nutrition, two aspects of these milk products have importance to Finnish Americans: one is cultural and the other, social.

Out of the large repertoire of foods brought by Finnish immigrants to Michigan, only a relatively small number have been maintained by their third-, fourth-, and fifth-generation descendants. Finnish Americans eat more hamburgers, pizza, and pasties than they do foods of Finnish origin. Yet the Finnish American foods that survive have great symbolic value. To consume them, even to discuss them with family, friends, and new acquaintances, is to affirm one’s ethnic identity. Food, like few other cultural features, is a strong symbol of who we are. *Viili* and *juusto* serve this cultural function, just as do several other items in the contemporary Finnish American menu.⁵

The social aspect of these milk products has to do with the network of interrelated people necessary to their distribution. Inevitably, the starter necessary to make *viili* is lost: one forgets to save some of the previous batch, someone eats it all, or a bad batch is produced. No problem! One merely borrows some from a next-door neighbor, a friend across town, or a cousin living on the family farm. The problem is more difficult for those Finnish Americans who have migrated beyond the Finnish American settlements, as many were forced to do by economic circumstances. For those still maintaining ties, one can get a starter on the next visit home. But for those who have lost sustained contact, it may mean also losing one more attribute of one’s Finnishness.

When an editor of a Finnish American newspaper offered to send *viili* starters to readers, she was buried with requests, many stating the offer “was a dream come true.” One recipient wrote, “Thank you for the *viili* culture you sent me. You have no idea of the joy in our home when we had a bowl of ‘feelia’— that wonderful flavor and ‘strings’”, referring to the elastic stretch (*FAR*, Jan. 1997).

Similarly, to know where to get the very best *juusto* is a demonstration of one’s knowledge of and participation in the local Finnish American community. Within any Finnish American settlement are only a limited number of *juusto* makers. Sources become more and more scarce as the number of families keeping milk cows continues to decline and the enforcement of health department regulations make nearly all existing sources illegal. Sources remain, selling illegally or giving *juusto* without charge to relatives and chosen friends, but there has been a tremendous decrease of available sources for most of the Finnish American community. Having a source of *juusto* has become an important indication of one’s connections.

If we were to devise a questionnaire designed to distinguish members of the Finnish American community from those people merely of Finnish American ancestry, one of the questions that would have to be asked (perhaps even the only question) would be: "Do you know someone from whom to get a *viili* starter or a source of *juusto*?"

These cultural and social aspects are interrelated: to know the Finnish American social network adequately enough to know sources of *juusto* and *viili* starter has symbolic importance. One is a member of a larger social entity with its own specific cultural attributes, including foodways, that sets it apart from other Americans. This is a measure of how Finnish you are.

Acknowledgments

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Endnotes

1. According to Harold McGee (pp. 7-8), humans are exceptional among mammals, because they drink milk after they begin to eat solid food. In fact, even among humans those who drink milk after infancy are the exception. This is not just a matter of taste or of custom. Most humans lose the lactose-breaking enzyme, lactase, by age 3½. This inability to digest milk sugar became known only in the late 1960's, because of a strong Eurocentric bias and because most Westerners, particularly those of northern European background, are capable of digesting lactose in adulthood. Only about 10% of white Americans, as compared to 70% of black Americans, are lactose intolerant. It has been suggested that a genetic trait of continuing lactase production arose in northern European people because it conferred the advantages of increased intake and improved absorption of calcium on a group whose dark, cold environment developed little vitamin D in the skin. Finns, on the other hand, seem to be an anomaly; many of them do not have this genetic trait, presumably because they migrated to the Nordic region more recently.
2. *Viilia* and its Americanization, *feelia*, are in the genitive case, meaning "some *viili*".
3. Armenian immigrants describe bringing their starter for *madzoon* (yogurt) by the same method.
4. As with *viilia* (see note 2), *juustoa* is the genitive case, meaning "some cheese".
5. Some of the more common foods are *nisu* or *pulla* (sweet cardamom bread), *mojakka* (stew of fish or meat), *riisipuuro* (rice porridge cooked in milk), *pannukakku* or *kropsu* (oven pancake), *korppu* (sweet crisp toast or rusk).

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C.H.A.A. THEME MEAL



A CRUISE ON THE RHEIN (OR THE HURON)

Ann Arbor—and for that matter most of the Midwest—has a significant German heritage, and the influence of German food extends through much of what we think of as American cuisine. Approximately 20% of the people living in Michigan today can claim some German ancestry.

In Ann Arbor itself and the surrounding area, the German population was once predominant, and its influence can still be felt in the Old West Side or at Rentschler Farm in neighboring Saline. German cooking has been popularized by local restaurants such as Metzger's (est. 1928), Flautz's (1930's-40's), the Old German (c.1930 – 1995), and the Heidelberg (est. 1962), as well as at German Park (est. 1938), a popular outdoor club that carries on the *biergarten* tradition every Summer, complete with picnics, beer, sausages, polka and oompah bands, and folk dancing.

Celebrating these German customs and foods, both in the Old World and the New, was the goal of the 2009 CHAA Summer Theme Meal, “A Cruise on the Rhein (or the Huron)”, held at the Earhart Village Clubhouse on Sunday, August 16. The well-crafted registration packet created by meal coordinators Joanne and Art Cole invited us to recall memories of traditional German and German-Jewish dishes from old family recipes, from local German restaurants, or from a trip to Central Europe, perhaps a visit to the Munich Oktoberfest. This would also be a chance to explore the mutual influence between German cuisine and that of neighboring lands such as Austria, Switzerland, Denmark, and Alsace. The Coles arranged library and online access to several useful cookbooks.

An atmosphere of *gemütlichkeit* (cheerfulness, heartiness) prevailed at the clubhouse on Sunday when over 40 CHAA members and friends assembled with their dishes, arranged on a long central row of tables. Below, we provide a summary of some of the meal highlights.

Bread and Liquid Bread

While wine and other drinks were available, the beverage of choice at our meal was beer, in honor of next year's bicentennial of the Munich Oktoberfest. Here is how Mimi Sheraton described the Munich event over forty years ago in her *The German Cookbook* (1965):

Certainly no beer festival can match Munich's Oktoberfest, which runs for the last two weeks of September, a tradition since 1810, when it was begun as a celebration of a royal wedding. Now it celebrates the arrival of the first Märzenbier, the new beer brewed the previous March. Ten thousand people can be served in each of seven tents set up on the fairgrounds by the

city's leading breweries—seventy thousand people in all, each night for two weeks. The air sizzles with barbecuing chicken, fish and Bratwurst, and rings with the music of big brass bands and carnival screams, all ending in what must be the biggest municipal Katzenjammer (hangover) in the world.

Beverages made from fermented barley appeared very early in German history; this “liquid bread” was the most reliable way to preserve grain. Beer as we know it was first brewed in the Middle Ages by monks at the Tegernsee monastery in Munich. For centuries, production followed the *Reinheitsgebot*, the purity regulation dating to 1516, which specified that only barley, hops, and water could be used in brewing; this was eased somewhat by EU regulations about 20 years ago. (For more on German beer history, see Sabrina Broselow Moser, “The Great German Thirst”, *Repast* Fall 2005, pp. 3-4.) *Met* (mead), a yeast-fermented honey beverage, appeared in Germany in ancient times, and the tradition was kept up in certain medieval monasteries where honey was produced.

Autumn festivals such as Oktoberfest arose especially to celebrate the grain harvest, the arrival of the March beer, and the resumption of brewing after a nearly six-month hiatus. (In these days before refrigeration, hot weather meant the proliferation of microbes that soured beer.) Munich, situated in southern Germany and the historic center of German beer production, now draws about 6 million visitors annually to its festival. Traditionally in Munich, and into modern times, beer was delivered door-to-door on carts, with each household bringing out its own jugs to be refilled. The *brauhaus* (beer hall), which first appeared in Munich, was originally a brewery-operated eatery. The fare served in a German *brauhaus* or *bierstube* (beer tavern) tends to be heartier, more ample, albeit less refined, than that of a wine restaurant.

Today, most German beer is *lagerbier*, literally “stored beer”, so called because it is left to sit and ferment longer and at a lower temperature than are ales and other beers. The invention of lager meant that there was a form of beer strong enough to withstand transport for sale outside the brewer's own locality.

The Coles supplied us with two types of lager in five-liter kegs. The first was a bock beer, Einbecker Mai-Ur-Bock. Einbeck, situated in Lower Saxony in the north of Germany, is the town where bock beer originated in the 15th Century. Compared to other lagers, the bocks are heavier, darker, more alcoholic (about 6.5%), with more of a malty or caramel taste, and historically were brewed for special occasions such as Christmas and Easter. The prime season for drinking bock beer is Lent, when the beer brewed the previous Fall first becomes available. It is teamed with *bockwurst* (a large white veal sausage), mustard, pretzels, and white radishes.

Our other lager was a *pils* type made by Eku in Kulmbach, a town in northern Bavaria famous for its beer. Compared to bock beer, *pils*, which is believed to have originated in Pilsen, Czechoslovakia in the 1800's, has a lighter, spicier taste coming mainly from hops, and is less alcoholic (about 5%).

Alongside beer, and closely associated with it, bread is the other great German fermented-grain product of yore. Generally, the loaves were baked not at home but professionally in a



Nancy Sannar’s Bayerischer wurstsalat, or Bavarian sausage salad. Photos: Mariam Breed

to farmers along with instructions for their cultivation.

Two different versions of *gurkensalat* (cucumber vinaigrette salad) were brought, one by Patty Turpen and Carl Paulina, the other by Nancy McClintic, which she dubbed “Grandma’s cucumbers and onions”. Nancy’s version used sugar as well as vinegar to achieve the sweet and sour taste that is preferred by so many Germans. Sweet and sour dishes were more common in Europe in medieval times, but in Germany they persisted strongly into the modern era. One of the most famous of these is the beef dish called *sauerbraten*. The taste for sweet and sour was one of the most distinctive food customs brought to the Americas by early German-speaking immigrants.

We sampled other vinegar salads:

- *rote rübensalat* (pickled-beet salad) [Pat Cornett and Mel Annis]
- *Bayerischer wurstsalat* (Bavarian sausage salad) and *tomaten mit wurstsalat* (tomatoes stuffed with sausage salad) [Nancy Sannar]
- *feiner rindfleischsalat* (beef salad) [Phil and Barbara Zaret], made with beef, hard-boiled egg, potato, onion, cucumber pickle, and a marinade of mustard, beef stock, oil and vinegar. Phil used a recipe from Elizabeth Schuler’s *German Cookery* (English translation, 1955). In Germany, leftover boiled beef rump or brisket is valued for use in such salads or in other dishes, such as a sweet and sour casserole called *rindfleisch mit äpfeln* (beef with apples).

country *steinofen* (stone oven) or urban *bäckerei* (bakery). Bread can be eaten at any meal, but is the backbone of *brotzeit* (“bread time”), the traditional large late-morning meal eaten about 10:30 or 11 a.m. (not to be confused with the earlier and lighter *frühstück*, which is break-fast per se). *Roggenbrot* (rye bread) [contributed by Pat Cornett and Mel Annis], considered characteristically Jewish in America but not in Europe, is traditionally made with the addition of beer. Pat made two loaves of a caraway-seed version that she adapted from a recipe in Rose Levy Beranbaum’s *The Bread Bible* (2003).

A Genius for Preserving Foods

To kick off our meal, we enjoyed several cold appetizers and vinegar-based salads, a hot soup, and two warm vegetable dishes.

One appetizer, *heringstopf mit saurer sahne* (herring from a jar, with sour cream) [Nancy Sannar], served to remind us once again of the importance of salt-preserved herring in the history of northern Europe (see *Repast* Fall 2007, p. 10). Nancy followed instructions in *Recipes of the Old German Restaurant and Other Traditional German Recipes* (2000), which helps carry on the legacy of Ann Arbor’s Old German Restaurant. The cookbook was compiled by Nancy’s German-born friend Marzella Leib, who was a waitress at the “Old G” for many years, and it was issued by Proctor Publications of Ann Arbor, founded by former CHAA member Hazel Proctor. Other appetizers that Nancy prepared included:

- *lachsstüten mit rahm* (cones of cured salmon, with cream), served with thin-sliced German bread
- *bleichsellerie mit roquefortkäse* (ribbed celery stuffed with Roquefort cheese and walnuts).

Soup, generally based on a broth or stock, was once the first course of nearly every German lunch and dinner. *Kartoffelsuppe* (potato soup) [Rich Kato] was prepared from a recipe in Mimi Sheraton’s book. The diced potatoes and other vegetables are sautéed in butter, then joined by flour, water, marjoram, parsley, and dill. The prefix *grüne* is often added to the name if the herbs give the soup a notably green color. The potato, so important in modern German cookery, wasn’t introduced to the country until the 17th Century, and wasn’t widely eaten until the late 18th Century, when Frederick the Great distributed free seed potatoes

A couple of our warm dishes were also made sweet-and-sour by the combination of sugar and vinegar:

- *rotkohl mit äpfeln* (casserole of red cabbage with apples) [Doris Miller], a common side-dish for meat roasts. (Note that cabbage goes by two different names in Germany: *kohl* and *kraut*.)
- *grüne bohnen, süß-saure* (green beans with sweet-and-sour bacon sauce) [Pam Dishman].

As seen with many of the salted or vinegared foods mentioned above, and also with the famous *sauerkraut* discussed below, the Germans relied heavily on the art of pickling and other preservation techniques alongside grain fermentation. In former centuries, pickles lent some additional zest (not to mention nutrients) to a diet that could be otherwise dreary, especially during the Winter and among the poor. Summer garden vegetables were easy to pickle in the home kitchen and store in a cellar or outdoor structure for later use. Pickles also found their way into all sorts of other German dishes, such as via the sauces *gurkensosse* and *remouladensosse*, both made with minced cucumber pickles. The German sailor’s breakfast hash *labskaus* is made with pickled beets, pickled herring, and pickled pork or corned beef. (For more on traditional preservation techniques, see Agnes Dikeman, “Depression-Era Cooking on a German-American Farm in Michigan”, *Repast* Spring 2007.)

Bring on the Meat

The most popular meats in Germany have been pork and veal, in that order. The flesh of wild boar has been prized since ancient Roman times, but in the modern era domesticated pigs and cattle are more the norm.

continued on next page

GERMAN THEME MEAL *continued from page 15*



Joanne and Art Cole's veal frikadellen.

It was veal that Joanne and Art Cole selected as the meat for their delicious *frikadellen*. These mild-flavored meat patties might have originated in Denmark, and are popular throughout both countries today. The meat, which can be beef, veal, pork, or some combination of these, is ground and blended with breadcrumbs, onions, egg, and seasoning. The mixture is formed into small hamburger-like patties that are fried in butter. These can be served hot or cold, usually as an appetizer, light meal, or snack, frequently in a *brötchen* (hard bread roll), and often accompanied by potato salad or green salad. Some like to add a condiment such as mustard, catsup, or Maggi. (Maggi is a popular German seasoning sauce dating to 1886, derived from vegetable protein and tasting somewhat like Worcestershire.) The Coles used a recipe from *Das Grosse Dr. Oetker Kochbuch* (1963). Dr. Oetker is a major food company based in Bielefeld— it started with baking powder in 1891— that also publishes cookbooks, and this hefty volume was a staple in many German kitchens for decades.

Germany boasts of as many as 1,000 or more types of sausage. These can be grouped into three categories: the raw (*rohurst*), the parboiled (*brühurst*), and the fully cooked (*kochurst*). One of the most famous examples of *brühurst* is the small, pale, mild-flavored *weisswurst* (literally “white sausage”) [Laura and Dan Gillis], which is made mostly with veal. Like *brühurst* in general, *weisswurst* is quite perishable. It is traditionally made early in the morning and eaten soon thereafter; as the Germans say, “it should not be allowed to hear the church bells’ chime” at noon. It’s a particular specialty of Munich, where it is often eaten for the late-morning *brotzeit* along with beer, bread, and a special *weisswurst* mustard; of course, it’s also extremely popular at Oktoberfest. Purchased at Sparrow Market in Ann Arbor, the sausages brought by the Gillises were made with veal and pork-butt at an artisanal butcher shop called Alexander and Hornung (www.alexanderhornung.com), established in the 1950’s in a German-Polish neighborhood on Detroit’s East side. The accompanying mustard, selected by the Gillises at Zingerman’s Deli, was an import from the *Kunstmühle*, a mustard mill that for centuries has gained fame for the little town of Kleinhettstedt in Thuringia.

Alongside such mild sausages, German cuisine is even more famed for its use of strong-flavored meats, such as roasts, smoked bacon, and cured hams. We feasted on two dishes that partnered

such meats with sauerkraut: the Amish “Pigs in a Silk Dress” [Kay and Steve Oldstrom], and its world-famous Alsatian forebear, *choucroute garnie à l’Alsacienne* [Boris Silberberg and Frances Williams]. Kay nestled country spareribs and sausages in a “silk dress” made with sauerkraut, apple, onion, cloves, brown sugar, and wine. Interestingly, the word *choucroute* is formed from French and German words for cabbage (*chou* and *kraut*, respectively). Boris, who was raised in this historically French and German region of Alsace, emphasizes that in preparing the dish the sauerkraut must first be rinsed thoroughly of its salt. He then braises onion, carrot, and ham in olive oil before adding the kraut, along with white vermouth and homemade chicken stock. This is covered and cooked over very low heat for 5-6 hours.

Thus, sauerkraut is not only used as a pickle garnish but is incorporated into cooked dishes— in fact, into an amazing variety of them. Traditional German home cellars had a barrel of cucumber pickles and another barrel of fermenting sauerkraut. Unlike pickles that are preserved in brine or other liquids, the sauerkraut is made by dry-salting and pressing shredded leaves of hard white cabbage, a treatment that helps expel as much of the moisture as possible. This salted cabbage is packed into barrels or crocks where it ferments for a few months. The procedure evolved from earlier vinegar-based cabbage pickling, a practice believed to have been transplanted from China to Hungary by migrating Central Asian peoples in the 13th Century. The evolved technique spread westward from Hungary through Austria and Germany and as far as Alsace.

Rindfleisch rouladen mit spätzlen (beef rolls with tiny dumplings) [Sherry Sundling] was another spectacular meat dish at our meal. Using a recipe from her paternal grandmother, Grandma Claxton, Sherry pounded thin slices of beef, spread them with mustard, rolled them up to surround a mixture of crumbled bacon, chopped onion, and dill pickle, and tied them up. She dusted these rolls with flour and fried them in bacon fat, then placed them in a casserole dish, added some simmering-gravy, and baked them in an oven for two hours. Trimmed cutlets for making such *rouladen* are standard items in German butcher shops.

The *spätzlen* are a specialty of that part of Schwaben that borders Alsace. They are made with a pasta-like egg dough, sliced or extruded into small irregular pieces, and boiled *al dente* in salted water. They can be served in a broth, topped with melted butter or cheese, or combined with meats, gravies, fish, vegetables, fruits, or sweet sauces. They represent one point in a very wide spectrum of German noodles and dumplings, fashioned with dough prepared from either flour or from shreds of stale bread. A few other points on the spectrum include: *knödel* (boiled milk-egg noodles), *dampfnudeln* (sweet, steamed, yeasted dumplings), *griessklösschen* (boiled semolina dumplings), *semmelklösse* (boiled bread dumplings), *kartoffelklösse* (boiled potato dumplings), *klopse* (meat dumplings), *reibebe* (grated flecks of egg noodle), *maultaschen* (ravioli). To eat such items in broth is probably the oldest manner of consumption, a practice known to date back to medieval times in southern Europe.

Pot-roasted chicken [Jane and Herbert Kaufer] was adapted from a family recipe of Russian immigrant origin, but is similar to what one might find in Germany. *Braten* (roast) as a general category is widely considered the national dish, and pot-roasting was traditionally preferred to oven-roasting. Most often in the

German kitchen, the meat for pot-roasting is pork, venison, or beef, and it is first marinated to increase its tenderness and flavor, the classic example being beef *sauerbraten*. Goose and duck are actually more important than chicken in this cuisine, but they are usually stewed or braised rather than roasted.

Monastic Influences

Only a few decades after Gutenberg invented his printing press, there appeared the first published German cookbook, *Küchenmeisterei*. The book, which went through over a dozen editions between 1485 and 1500, is believed to have been compiled in a monastery in southern Germany. The foremost evidence for this is its emphasis on foods associated with Lent. Every year during these weeks of penitence and abstention from meat, Church adherents rely on dishes made with milk, cheese, eggs, beans, or freshwater fish to supplement the protein found in grains. Another clue is the book's substitution of honey and herbs—typical products of monasteries—in place of expensive, imported sugar and spices. These humble ingredients retained a special importance in Germany, partly because of their role in religious life. (And we have already referred to the part played by monasteries in the development of a less humble product, alcoholic beverages.)

A savory tart called *zwiebelkäsekuchen* (literally “onion-cheese cake”) [Randy Schwartz and Mariam Breed] is an example of a dish that probably arose as Lenten fare. This version was made with a somewhat Americanized recipe from Randy's mother (his parents lived in Frankfurt, Heidelberg, and Zürich in 1945-53). The heavy filling consists of shredded Swiss and cheddar cheese, sour cream, flour, eggs, sautéed onion slices, and seasoning.

Schwaben in Germany, and nearby Lorraine in France, became famous for a non-Lenten version, *zwiebelkuchen* (“onion cake”), which adds diced, sautéed bacon to the filling. This version retains the onions and sour cream, but omits the cheese and most of the flour, so it comes out much lighter. In France this is called *quiche*, a word derived from *kuchen*. We had two versions made by Eleanor Hoag and Carroll and John Thomson, respectively. Both parties used the same recipe from Jeff Smith's *The Frugal Gourmet on Our Immigrant Ancestors* (1990).

Sweets from the Home and the Confectioner

Rote grütze mit vanillesahne (red berry pudding with vanilla cream) [Patrick and Bonnie Ion], a sweet, creamy pudding served at room temperature, is probably the most popular traditional dessert in northern Germany, as well as in Denmark where its name is *rødgrød*. Both names mean “red groats”; originally, the dish consisted of groats cooked with the preserved juices of blackcurrants, redcurrants, or other red fruits, and it was eaten with milk or cream. In the modern dish, the groats are usually dispensed with, and a thickener such as gelatin, cornstarch, or in this recipe, tapioca, is added to the boiling syrup. Patrick made his version with strawberries, and garnished the pudding with a few raspberries and the vanilla cream. He followed a recipe in *Dr. Oetker: Feste Feiern* (1994), from the Dr. Oetker series mentioned earlier.

Springerle [Harriet Larson] is one of the best-known examples of the German art of *weihnachtsgebäck* (Christmas baking). It is a large, plump, rectangular cookie, on the top of



Jan Longone's *zitrortorte mit schlagsahne* (lemon cake with whipped cream) was served with blueberries.

which an image has been impressed using a decorated mold or a special rolling pin. The ingredients are simply eggs, sugar, and flour, and to protect the designs the cookies are air-dried for several hours before baking. The result, plain-tasting and brittle-crust, is prized for its decoration and symbolism rather than its delectability. Records of *springerle* date back to the late Middle Ages. It seems that the oldest designs were of animals, arousing the suspicion that the cookies were formerly pagan tokens of animal sacrifice.

German *konditoreien* (confectioner's shops) are famous for their delicious and lavishly decorated creations, including cakes, tortes, layered pastries, cookies, macaroons, marzipan, and other sweets. These professionally baked goods are strongly associated with the national custom of afternoon coffee; indeed, the larger of the *konditoreien* usually have cafés attached to them. We were able to sample several homemade versions of these elegant treats:

- *königskuchen* (king's cake) [Julie and Robert Lewis], a loaf cake with raisins, almonds, and rum. Julie used a recipe from Nika S. Hazelton's *The Cooking of Germany* (Time-Life Books, 1969).
- *zitrortorte mit schlagsahne und beeren* (lemon cake with whipped cream and berries) [Jan and Dan Longone]
- *haselnusstorte* (hazelnut torte) [Rita and Jim Goss], from a recipe in Edda Meyer-Berkhout's *Best of German Cooking* (1984)
- *walnusstorte* (walnut torte) [Sonia Manchek]
- *kirschenstrudel* (cherry strudel) [Yvonne and Bill Lockwood].

The last few of the above items are also associated with the fine baking traditions of the Austro-Hungarian empire; they likely reached Germany from such cities as Budapest, Vienna, and Salzburg. An early cookbook by Conrad Hagger, *Neues Salzburger Koch-buch* (Augsburg, Germany, 1719), was among those that helped spread Austrian food customs to Germany. ■

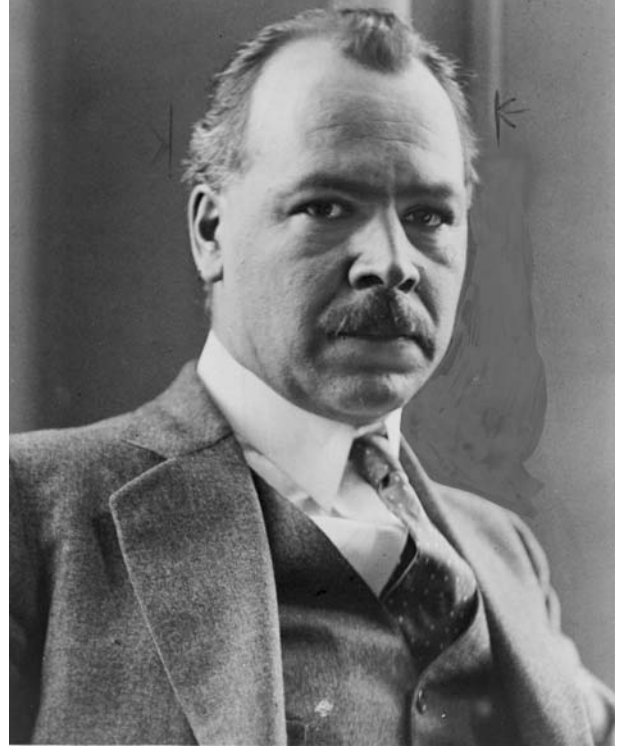
Book Review

AN EARLY CHAMPION OF GLOBAL FOOD DIVERSITY

by Wendell McKay

New CHAA member Wendell McKay is a cook at Zingerman's Delicatessen in Ann Arbor. A native of Baton Rouge, Wendell received his M.A. in history from the University of Akron and has taught classes on Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian history and culture. He has also published horror stories and film reviews.

Gary Paul Nabhan,
*Where Our Food Comes From: Retracing
Nikolay Vavilov's Quest to End Famine*
Washington, DC: Island Press, 2009
266 pp., \$24.95 cloth



Nikolay Vavilov (1887-1943)

Library of Congress photo.

One of the great scientific heroes of the 20th Century, Nikolay Vavilov (1887-1943), performed groundbreaking work in the field of plant genetics and distribution, a record all the more remarkable for his long but sadly terminated existence during the political upheavals of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union. A relative survivor compared with many of the cultural luminaries and “old Bolsheviks” of the era, Vavilov pioneered concepts and ideas still urgently relevant today, especially concerning plant migration and cultural diffusion in agriculture. His rigorous scientific ethics and doggedly independent mind inevitably brought him into conflict with Soviet Russia’s feared charlatan supreme of science—Stalin’s favorite, Trofim Lysenko. Lysenko, the geneticist whose tentacles ensnared the whole of the great Soviet scientific establishment (and who famously bedeviled the career of the young Andrei Sakharov), clearly had little use for a scientist of Vavilov’s caliber and international reputation. Yet Vavilov’s scientific researches were of incalculable importance to the study of botany and the development of solutions to world crop failure and famine.

Decades after the upheaval surrounding Vavilov’s work, the increase in problems related to climate change and the competition between conventional and organic agriculture have rendered his work more vital and pertinent than ever. Its continuing importance understandably attracted the imagination of Gary Paul Nabhan, the famous ethnobotanist and chronicler of foodways and their histories. In the past decade Nabhan, who is originally from the Michigan City, Indiana, area, has founded Native Seeds/ SEARCH in Tucson, Arizona to preserve native plants in the Southwest, and Renewing America’s Food Traditions (RAFT) to preserve endangered native foods like heritage turkeys and tepary beans.

Dr. Nabhan’s recent book, *Where Our Food Comes From: Retracing Nikolay Vavilov’s Quest to End Famine*, follows very much in the footsteps of his earlier *Why Some Like It Hot* (2007), an examination of global foodways and the variety of intersections between taste, genetics, and culture. However, while I found the earlier work to be slightly amorphous and scattershot, *Where Our Food Comes From* has a great advantage in a gripping story to couple with Nabhan’s penchant for globetrotting and witty, trenchant observations on food and culture. The result is an engrossing history and travelogue that resurrects a journey undertaken with the highest of motives: a desire to find the best conditions for plant species to thrive in an attempt to target and eradicate the causes of famine. The coincidence of Vavilov’s later travels with the horrific “terror-famines” of early Stalinism provides an undercurrent of irony and pathos that only strengthens the narrative power and fascination of Nabhan’s work.

Vavilov was born into a well-off middle-class family with a fortuitous interest in science and philanthropy. His early career unfolded in the dying days of the czarist system, in which famines and pogroms respectively hindered and helped the political plans of the government. Vavilov’s strong identification with the Russian peasantry encouraged him to go into botany, a field then undergoing a number of conceptual and systemic changes. New discoveries in genetics and the frequent disasters in Russian agriculture of the time determined Vavilov’s eventual career path, that of a botanical field researcher with a keen eye for the importance of local cultural and agricultural traditions. For nearly 20 years, he conducted a series of expeditions around the world searching for the places of origin of many common seeds and cereals. He felt certain that if the process and conditions of origin could be properly known, work could be done to make such cereals vastly more resistant to viruses and failure than they had been in the past, thus reducing the likelihood of famine for future generations. In doing so, he paid

much more attention and respect than anyone before him to the local people and their agricultural methods, an approach almost diametrically opposed to the standard (if unconscious) condescension of contemporary field scientists.

The early Soviet government was all in favor of Vavilov's field researches, grimly conscious of their reliance as an urban-based regime on the vast food resources of the Russian peasantry. He suffered little interference and won much acclaim throughout the 1920's, until power struggles later in the decade brought Josef Stalin to power. The new Soviet leader was hardly one to worry overmuch about the sufferings of the peasantry. Stalin came to view Vavilov's work as not only a waste of time in the midst of his own brutal crash course in industrialization, but also as dangerously "internationalist" at a time when he was trying to seal the country off from foreign influences and ideas.

Struck by the similarities between Vavilov's time and his own (and the greater urgency of the latter), Nabhan retraced Vavilov's steps around the world, visiting the same countries and regions that the great botanist first studied in the 1920's and 1930's. Along the way, he met with various scientists and scholars to get a wider context for the continuing problems of government policy and natural change that inform and bedevil the production of cereals according to time-honored local methods. Visiting the site of Vavilov's first major journey, the Pamir Mountains of Central Asia, he finds that global warming has eroded the natural glacier cover and threatened an incomparable native stock of wild onions and grasses. Nabhan finds the same mix of official ineptitude and climate change affecting several other scenes of Vavilov's researches. In Italy's Po Valley, staples like rice and fava beans suffer from a long-term drought, exacerbated by an antiquated agricultural policy and rising temperatures.

Occasionally Nabhan finds politics or culture to be a greater determinant than nature or climate, especially when his own experiences come closer to Vavilov's than he expected. Nabhan's ancestral homeland in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley proves just as strife-ridden and unstable after the Israeli invasion of 2006 as it was during the anti-French Druse rebellions of 80 years earlier, in which Vavilov found himself embroiled. The author's present home of the American Southwest suffers from droughts no less dangerous than the opening stages of the "Dust Bowl"—which Vavilov witnessed first-hand in 1930—and the native Hopi and Navajo farmers no less embattled in their fight to preserve traditional farming as a way of life.

Vavilov's travels in Ethiopia were probably his most famous. They helped popularize Ethiopia as a "homeland" for agricultural diversity (in much the same way as paleontologist Donald Johansen's "Lucy" discovery would do for humankind in the 1970's), due to the region's unusual mix of mountainous terrain and fertile river valleys. Nearly a century after Vavilov, Nabhan finds that Ethiopia's diversity continues to fight an uphill battle. After the crippling famine of the 1980's, well-intentioned food aid from conventional suppliers has proven to be a double-edged sword. Native seeds and grasses surviving for millennia find themselves crowded out by foreign varieties strengthened in Western labs.

The same situation prevails in Kazakhstan, where Nabhan meets the remarkable Aimak Dzangaliev, a botanist who actually

worked with Vavilov. Dzangaliev directs Nabhan's attention to the prevalence of "conventional" seeds and cereals, first provided by Soviet central planning and later by Western aid agencies. In even implicitly acknowledging the possibility of genetically modified agriculture, Nabhan highlights one of the strengths of his approach and leads into the central tragedy of Soviet agriculture and Vavilov's later years. The author's admiring but dispassionate survey of his subject doesn't prevent him from revealing Vavilov to be a man of his time and fascinated by the kind of genetic breakthrough that would later produce "GM" foods and farming. The same "critical but open-minded" attitude would lead Vavilov into a well-meaning but ominous underestimation of the intellectual blight that nearly destroyed Soviet agriculture and science during the 1930's and 1940's.

The Ukrainian "terror-famines" of the early 1930's, designed to destroy the supposed threat of the "kulaks" ("middle-class" peasants) and to provide a food supply for the urban centers and factories at the heart of the Five-Year Plan, left Stalin with the need to find a politically acceptable solution and a scapegoat for his own crimes. The solution came from Trofim Lysenko, an opportunistic, low-level agronomist who found a way to fame and power through a revival of Lamarckian evolution, the discredited early-19th-Century theory that proposed evolutionary changes within single generations. If such a system could apply to crops that desperately needed protection from cold and insect-borne blight, then the USSR's dangerous food situation could be remedied within a decade or even less. Vavilov's more traditional scientific method, relying on evidence and peer review, swiftly fell into disfavor, especially as his globetrotting was frowned upon by many in the Party's upper echelons.

Vavilov crossed both Lysenko and Stalin a number of times, some of them harrowingly described by Nabhan (particularly a chilling moment when Vavilov accidentally ran into Stalin while rounding a hallway corner). By 1936, Lysenko unquestionably gained the upper hand in the struggle, and Vavilov found himself relegated to the scientific backbenches. A poetically desperate address to a scientific congress in 1939, delivered in conditions of intolerable stress, probably sealed his fate. He was arrested by the NKVD while carrying out a field survey in the Carpathian Mountains in 1940, interrogated, and sentenced to death—the sentence commuted to hard labor in the camps after intercession from scientists both Soviet and foreign. In 1943, he finally died—in not the least irony of his story—from slow starvation.

Nabhan's admirably wide-ranging, discursive approach to his subjects meets its match in Vavilov and his life, replete with grim ironies and omens for the future. Both an homage to and continuation of Vavilov's work, *Where Our Food Comes From* poses a number of questions, especially regarding the nature of change in both politics and agriculture. Many of the problems of Vavilov's day are still with us. How can governments best address the needs of growing populations? How much of an accommodation with local agriculture must genetic science make? How will local populations and their growing seasons cope with a fundamental change in climate? In revisiting the scenes of Vavilov's life and work both physically and literarily, Nabhan may not definitively answer these questions, but he stresses their importance in a way that vindicates and honors the work of his subject. ■

CHAA CALENDAR

(Unless otherwise noted, programs are scheduled for 4-6 p.m. at Ann Arbor Senior Center, 1320 Baldwin Ave.)

Sunday, December 13, 2009

4-7 p.m., Earhart Village Clubhouse
(835 Greenhills Drive, Ann Arbor)
CHAA annual participatory theme meal,
“Traditional Pub Food from the British Isles”

Sunday, January 17, 2010

Jules Van Dyck-Dobos,
Chef-owner of
Le Dog, Ann Arbor

Sunday, February 21, 2010

Cynthia Furlong Reynolds, author,
*“Jiffy”: A Family Tradition, Mixing
Business and Old-Fashioned Values*

Sunday, March 21, 2010

At Zingerman’s Roadhouse
(2501 Jackson Avenue, Ann Arbor)
Ari Weinzweig, Managing Partner,
on his new book,
Zingerman’s Guide to Better Bacon

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Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

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First Class