

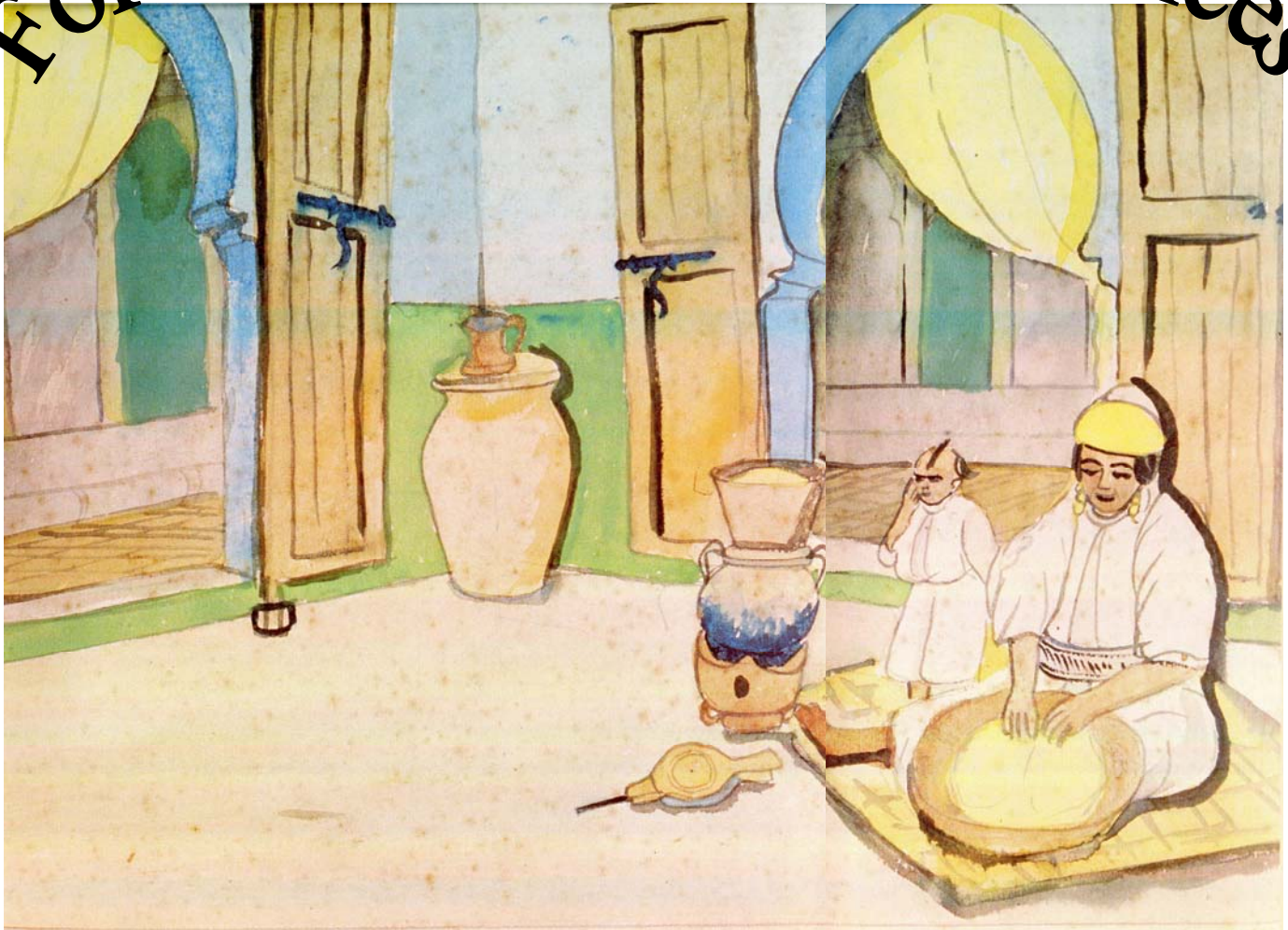


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Repast

Quarterly Publication of the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

Formative Food Experiences



“Preparing Couscous”, a watercolor by Moroccan chef and painter Mohammed Ben Ali R’bati (1861-1936), appears to depict a memory from his childhood.

Image from Daniel Rondeau, Abderrahman Slaoui, and Nicole de Pontcharra, *Mohammed Ben Ali R’bati: Un Peintre à Tanger en 1900* (Éditions Malika, 2000)



IN MEMORIAM: HAZEL PROCTOR

We were saddened to hear of the passing of former CHAA member Hazel Proctor, 91. She died on August 25 at Arbor Hospice following a short illness. She and her second husband, Jay Carp, joined CHAA in 2003 and remained members until 2005, when she moved to Milan, MI. She is survived by Jay and by two of her three sons, two grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Born in a ranch house on the outskirts of Austin, TX, Hazel Peabody Proctor, whose nickname was “Scoop”, eventually made her way to the Upper Midwest and became a leading businesswoman in Ann Arbor. One of her local companies was Proctor Publications, LLC, a longtime area publisher of fiction and nonfiction that Hazel and her eldest son, Don, co-founded and directed. (Since 2003 it has been a subsidiary of Publishing Ventures, Inc.) One of its food-related releases was Marzella Leib’s *Recipes of the Old German Restaurant and Other Traditional German Recipes* (2000). That book has helped carry on the legacy of Ann Arbor’s “Old G” restaurant, where the German-born Leib was a waitress for many years. At our German theme meal in August 2009, we sampled one of the book’s recipes, the appetizer *heringstopf mit saurer sahne* (herring from a jar, with sour cream), prepared by Leib’s friend Nancy Sannar.

Another of Hazel’s food-related claims to fame is that she designed the logo for Domino’s Pizza, now known around the world. She created the design while employed at an ad agency, Sam Fine Associates. Later, she was Vice President of Marketing at Ann Arbor Federal Savings and Great Lakes Federal Savings, and she had her own ad firm, The Proctor Agency, Inc.

Hazel also took a great interest in civic leadership and historical preservation. She was a past President of the Rotary Club of Ann Arbor and of the Ann Arbor Symphony, and was a supporter and participant with the Historical Society of Michigan. She also served as Editor for books on recent history written by her husband, Jay, including *Cold War Confessions: Inside Our Classified Defense Programs* (River Pointe Publications, 2007), which was based on his years of work on ballistic missile systems at GTE. ■

Repast

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FISH FOR BREAKFAST

by Ida Zektick Zack

Dr. Ida Zack, a new CHAA member, lives in West Bloomfield, MI. She holds a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Michigan State University, and has a psychotherapy practice based in Royal Oak.

Growing up in the 1950s in Brooklyn, in a single-parent home, I knew that Mom tried to prepare a variety of meals after work that were somewhat healthy and that my older brother and I would eat. These mostly consisted of broiled meat, salad, and vegetables, with canned fruit or ice cream for dessert. Sometimes, we would have asparagus in a mild cheese sauce on toast, or creamed dried beef, and occasionally, spaghetti. But every now and then she would break out the dreaded fish sticks, that awful package of frozen, breaded smelly stuff that even an obedient child like myself was challenged to get down. The only saving grace was the macaroni and cheese accompaniment, which I loved, but which was held out as a reward for eating the fish sticks.

Respite for all of us would be Summer visits to relatives by the seashore. I remember the special treat of spending a week with Great Aunt Jenny and Great Uncle Charlie at their boardwalk apartment on the outskirts of Atlantic City. These older relatives were kindly and rather indulgent, except when it came to food. Much value was placed on what and how much you ate. Being a good eater consisted of emptying your plate of whatever you were served, being willing to try new foods, and always expressing appreciation and enjoyment for what was provided. And somehow, I was always held up as the example of the well-behaved, good child for the other kids in the family to emulate.

So it came as a real challenge one Sunday noon, when Uncle Charlie brought home sea bass that he'd just caught on his boat early in the day. Of course, much ado was made of his efforts to get up early, successfully catch fish, and bring it home for us to enjoy. Fresh fish, from right out of the bay. What could be better? Aunt Jenny baked the sea bass in the toaster oven, and served it with scrambled eggs and toasted

bagels. For me, scrambled eggs and bagels would have been just fine, but the fish stopped me cold. All I could think of was those awful fish sticks. And you had to eat everything! I remember swallowing deeply, hoping I could get the strange stuff down. But to my amazement, the breakfast and the fish were mouth-wateringly delicious, setting off a love of fish that persists to this day. The buttery bagels were a wonderful complement to the mild and slightly sweet flesh of the sea bass.

In the many years since, I have been fortunate enough to have eaten Scottish smoked salmon and eggs on the Orient Express, with the sun shining in through Lalique-designed windows; dined *al fresco* in Sorrento, Italy, on fish caught that day from the Bay of Naples; and feasted on *branzino*, baked in a salt crust at an old trattoria in Venice. For years, my brother steamed fresh lobsters for us in the kitchen in New Jersey, as we dripped juices and butter over old tee shirts, throwing the cracked shells on newspapers.

But no meal has ever been tastier or more fondly remembered than that simple brunch by the seashore, lovingly prepared by a great aunt, many years ago. ■

MME. SUCZEK *continued from page 8*

I felt that I had to, as once again, my husband was not able to work for some time. So, using everything I had learned from Charity plus my own instincts and experience, I started my own catering business, Sherry's Catering. I catered for over 30 years before I felt it was time for me to retire in 2012. I had a good run.

I realize that I achieved what I did due to my being led by my own natural predisposition to learn and experience any and all areas of cooking— but still, one other thing is clear to me. There is Sherry before Mme. Charity deVicq Sucek, and there is a new, more knowledgeable, professional Sherry after Mme. Sucek. I have her to thank for many of my successes. Outside of my parents, she truly has been the Most Important Person in my personal and professional life. The person who formed and influenced me the most, who taught me the most, who gave to me her knowledge, appreciation, and world view of all things culinary. For this I will always be in her debt. She is, indeed, one of a kind... and very special to me. ■

THE LAST TIME I SAW FLORINA...

by Helen Ditouras Gordy

Helen Ditouras works at Schoolcraft College in Livonia, MI, where she is Assistant Professor of English and Co-Chair of the International Institute. Helen is a doctoral candidate at Wayne State University in Detroit, and is very interested in film studies. She lives in Windsor, ONT, with her husband, Robert Gordy, and their son, Mason.

As a young girl, my socialization was formed by my Greek immigrant parents, the Greek Orthodox Church, Greek immersion school, and my Italian neighborhood friends in small-city Windsor, Ontario. However, the greatest hegemonic tool my parents used short of an umbilical cord to the motherland was the VCR. Most of my pre-adolescent nights included our family of five, entranced by whatever old 1960s-era Greek musical or drama my parents had secured from the local Greek video store.

So, one Summer vacation, around 1988, when my parents decided to showcase each of their villages to my siblings and me, the eight-hour bus ride from Thessaloniki, Greece, all the way to Lemos, Prespa, a village consisting of less than 400 people, seemed like a glorious adventure. On board, the bus looked like the decrepit, albeit welcoming, vehicles I had seen in the movies. Hard, coarse bus seats equipped with several dusty windows, *sans* air-conditioning. I thought it was perfect. Very authentic.

As we journeyed from metropolitan Thessaloniki all the way to remote Prespa, the small, rolling mountains and the cliff-edged views of the crystal-clear Prespa Lakes were truly breathtaking. But it wasn't like the movies. In the musicals, a bus trip ALWAYS promised a toe-tapping, finger-snapping, hair-blowing, splendid expedition. And the catalyst for this experience undoubtedly included an infectious song, usually led by the prettiest girl on the bus, followed by the most handsome boy on the opposite end. Village-folk chorus included.

But that was hardly the encounter I experienced on the grueling bus ride to Florina, our three-quarters-of-the-way destination en route to Lemos. Instead of the fun-filled bus ride of the musicals, this ride was nauseating. Literally. Perhaps it was too many hours on

the bumpy bus, the mid-August blazing heat, or the maniacal bus driver hell-bent on perilously grazing each steep cliff overlooking the lakes; I was not a happy camper. Not to mention the endless, Camel-brand smoke rings I inhaled from the bus driver and the passengers on board. As a result, I vomited, multiple times, in a small plastic bag my mother kept in her purse for such occasions. And the smiling faces from the bus-ride-musicals? These were all replaced by the scowls of the travelers who for whatever reason felt the need to journey six hours to Florina, a relatively small town with a population of approximately 16,000.

This smoky, sweaty, suffocating excursion finally came to a halt when we arrived at Florina. We were all relieved to disembark from the bus and bid farewell to bus driver Stavros, who otherwise ignored us as he rummaged his seat for his lighter. As I gathered my bearings, I looked around me. The town was quite lovely, in retrospect. At the time, I hardly thought the old, derelict, cobblestone shops were anything special. The town was lined with beautiful trees, lush valleys, and a sparkling lake that strongly compensated for the semi-paved roads and the ragged infrastructure. And still, my unripe eyes could not focus upon or absorb the stunning atmosphere that unfolded before me.

The only thing I could think about was the rumble in my belly. We were all famished, having survived the unrelenting voyage from one end of provincial Macedonia to the other. And since this town, just an hour away from my mother's village, was intimately familiar to both of my parents, they nodded toward their favorite *taverna*, which invitingly displayed succulent, skewered rotisserie chickens that seductively turned at a snail's pace. I was hypnotized. It didn't matter that the restaurant was an antiquated, beech-wood building hanging on for dear life. Nor did I care that we were the only customers. I was hungry and my only mission was to satisfy the growling gripes escaping my stomach.

We walked in and were immediately greeted by a beaming waiter who I suspected was a one-man-band: waiter, cook, and proprietor. Nonetheless, I was starving, and given that there were few items to choose from, my siblings and I, true foreigners in the land of olive trees, ordered a safe bet: oven-roasted potatoes and meatballs. As oddly-paired as this entrée might seem, do not be fooled. A seasoned Greek cook can transform this seemingly bland meal into a delectable dinner (see recipe on next page).

When the food arrived, I greedily snatched the plate off the tray before the waiter could blink. I ate so fast I could barely breathe. As a matter of fact, I couldn't hear my mother's usual shriek that erupted each time I ate gluttonously. I was a repeat-offender when it came to my lack of table etiquette. But so be it. I had survived the bus ride and I was deserving of this delicious reward.

As I sat back in my chair like a brimming emperor, I caught a whiff of something so enchantingly pungent, I nearly collapsed in a culinary coma. I followed my nose all the way to the plate that sat before my father. I looked at the source of this pleasant aroma, and was shocked to see a meal of orange-colored baby mush. Nevertheless, I was intrigued. No— wrong word. I was enthralled. Despite the sloppy, pulpy texture of the dish, I knew at that very moment I had to taste it. Devour it.

I grabbed my fork and ruthlessly stabbed into my father's dinner plate. As I swallowed the bite I had been endlessly coveting, I closed my eyes. This was by far one of the tastiest bites I had ever consumed. I opened my eyes and met the smiling eyes of my mustached father. As my brother and sister recoiled in disgust, regrettably born with unsophisticated palates, my father lovingly asked, "Do you like the *iyantes*, *agape mou*?"

"I love them, *baba*," I blissfully replied. My mother let out a snarky laugh. "You like these, these peasant beans? Your father loves these too." In line with my brother and sister, she scoffed at my newfound affection for *iyantes*. But I didn't care. In my mind, the three of them were parochial fools who, in hindsight, had passed up the opportunity of a lifetime. Dismissively, I held up my plate and keenly looked at my father. Like the doting father he was, he filled my plate with half of his food. At that moment, I knew we formed a coalition that would never be severed.

Too many years have passed since I traveled that route to Florina. I hardly recall the magnificent cliffs or the dilapidated bus. The other day, in a moment of nostalgic reverie, I called my mother to ask her about the name of the unforgettable *taverna*. She couldn't remember, but she had visited Greece the previous Summer and knew for certain that it no longer existed. ■

Helen's Greek Meatball and Potatoes Recipe

For the meatballs:

- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 small onion, finely diced
- 2 Tablespoons parsley
- 1 egg
- 1/8 cup plain breadcrumbs
- 2 Tablespoons olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 small bowl with flour

Combine all of the ingredients except the flour in a bowl, and knead with your hands. When forming the meatballs, dip your hands in the flour to form each individual meatball. You should be able to form about 8-10 medium-size meatballs in total.

For the potatoes:

- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 8 medium-size potatoes, peeled and quartered
- 1 cup strained tomatoes
- 1 tablespoon Vegeta seasoning
- Salt, pepper, and sweet Hungarian paprika to taste

Pour the olive oil in the bottom of a roasting pan. Add the potatoes, tomatoes, and seasonings, and shake with roasting-pan lid on.

Remove the lid and add meatballs on top of the potatoes. Add 2 cups water and close with lid. Shake entire pan one more time before placing in oven. Bake for one hour at 375° F.

Helen's Homemade *Yiyantes* (Giant Baked Beans)

Note: *yiyantes* (Greek for "giants") is often transliterated instead as *gigantes*.

- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 medium-size onion, finely diced
- 1 clove garlic, finely diced
- 600 grams (about 21 oz.) dry giant lima beans, or two 14-oz. cans
- 3 Roma tomatoes, peeled and diced
- 1 medium-size carrot, peeled and diced
- 2 Tablespoons chopped celery leaves
- 1 1/2 Tablespoon Vegeta seasoning
- 1 teaspoon sweet Hungarian paprika
- Salt and pepper to taste

If using dry giant lima beans, cover with water and soak overnight in fridge.

In a Dutch oven, combine olive oil, onion, and garlic, and sauté for 2 minutes. Add remaining ingredients and sauté an additional 5 minutes.

Transfer entire contents to either a small roasting pan with lid or a CorningWare dish with lid. If necessary, add a bit of water to prevent sticking. Place in the oven and bake for 45 minutes at 300° F.

AN UNPARALLELED CULINARY
RESOURCE, TEACHER, AND HUMAN BEING



MME. CHARITY DEVICQ SUCZEK

by Sherry Sundling

Sherry Sundling has been a CHAA member since 1987. She graduated from the University of Michigan with a degree in German and speech therapy, but the bulk of her career was spent in the food industry. She cooked in several upscale restaurants in Southeastern Michigan, spent 17 years with the UM Residence Hall Dining Service, taught in-store and adult-education classes in cooking and kitchen equipment, and for 33 years ran a successful private business called Sherry's—Caterer of International Cuisine, where she prepared elegant food mostly for bar mitzvahs, weddings, and other social occasions. Sherry's previous articles for Repast include "Spies in the Pickle Dump" (Fall 2000) and "A Tantalizing Display: The Michigan Foodways Exhibit" (Summer 2007).

Some people remember learning to cook at their mother's side. Others might have been left to learn on their own, struggling soon after marriage

to learn how to put an appetizing meal on the table. Neither one was my experience.

Instead, it seems that from the time I can remember, I was always interested in food and its preparation. At the age of 5 I wanted to fry bacon. My mother had only said, "Turn it when it becomes brown." I stood on my stool by the stove, alone, and looked down at the bacon sizzling and curling up at the edges, pondering, "I wonder what shade of brown it is supposed to be?" Shades of tan, then browns of various tones gradually appeared. When Mom returned to check up on me, the bacon was well past brown and into black. As it was during WW2 and meat was being rationed, Mom was not pleased. But, I learned a lesson—the color of brown bacon.

Eating my paper-bag lunch in school one day, I sat next to my friend Karen (who was maybe a size 2), and she turned toward me and said, "Sharon, I can't eat this second piece of fudge. Would you like to have it?"

Would I?! My chubby fingers accepted it eagerly, devouring it rapidly, savoring every bite. As I swallowed the last morsel, I asked her, "Karen, this is delicious. Do you think your mother would give me the recipe?" I was 8 years old.

And so it continued. I read cookbooks as if they were novels, checking off recipes to try. I eagerly read the food pages in the *Detroit Free Press* every week, clipping out recipes that appealed to me, filing them away in my own recipe box. Sidney and Lucy Corbett from Grosse Ile, MI, were always interesting. But I was especially fond of Clementine Paddleford's syndicated columns. She had a wonderful way of writing, presenting the story of how she came to get the recipes in that week's column. I learned a lot from her.



Far left, Mme. Suzcek energetically espouses a point of cooking or recipe technique to us, her apprentices, before we sit down for lunch at her house one summer afternoon. Near left, she instructs a cooking class at the Birmingham, MI, Community Center.

Photos: Sherry Sundling



Photo accompanying a story on Mme. Suczek that ran on "The Woman's Page" of the *Grosse Pointe [Michigan] News*, February 16, 1956.

At the age of 12, I was baking for our neighbors in the little farming village of Britton, MI. I would take orders Saturday mornings, bake all day, and deliver the goods late that afternoon. I think I made \$28.00 that Winter. My business did not last long, but I learned a lot—above all, the fact that cooking for a living is *hard work*.

Classes from a Star

For the next 20 years, wherever I lived, I took cooking classes whenever they were offered. When my husband was drafted and sent to Vietnam, our children and I lived with my mother, and I was able to again read the *Detroit Free Press* food pages.

One day I saw an article about an exceptionally gifted and fascinating woman, a baroness born in Vienna by the name of Madame Charity deVicq Suczek. She was teaching cooking classes at the Birmingham Community Center, in the northern Detroit suburbs. I cut out the article, vowing to sign up for her classes if I ever got the opportunity. That opportunity came two years later when we moved to Birmingham.

Mme. Suczek was everything I had expected and more. She was a rather tall, statuesque woman, her graying hair pulled back in a bun. She had dark, gentle, but all-seeing eyes, and she used elegant gestures when speaking to her audience in her delightful Austrian accent. She always stood erect, back straight, her head held high, the result of her early training as a member of the nobility.

Her family had had to flee Vienna at the beginning of WW1. They lost everything. Locals rampaged through the house and grounds, taking or destroying everything in sight. Charity's family sought refuge in England with relatives. After the war, she was sent to

the Cordon Bleu in Paris, where many daughters of nobility went to learn not only how to cook, but also how to run a household. While there, she was taught by many famous chefs, such as Louis Diat, Fernand Point, and Escoffier, to name a few. That was the Golden Age of the Cordon Bleu.

As she spoke to the class, her deep knowledge of everything connected to food, wine, and the eating and drinking thereof, captured everyone's rapt attention. There was never any whispering or chit-chatting from any of us. We all hung onto her every word, afraid that if we didn't, we might miss one of her frequent 'pearls of culinary wisdom'.

And pearls they were. She would relate stories of experiences with certain chefs while at the Cordon Bleu or when working with famous chefs at their restaurants. Many of the stories were very funny, like the chef whom she asked, "How much wine did you add to the Champagne Chicken?" The chef thought for a moment, his tongue moving around the inside of his cheeks, then said, "Oh, about a mouthful." The class broke up with peals of laughter.

Mme. Suczek was fascinating, indeed. I lived for her weekly classes.

Every week she would teach us how to make three dishes. In addition, at the beginning of the class she would present a special cheese for us to try, discussing its type, how it was made, and where. Then, out would come bottles of the "Wine of the Week". We would learn its provenance: country of origin, the vineyard that produced it, the type of wine, its flavor and its characteristics. We would each get a small glass to try. First, she would ask us to move the wineglass in a circular direction, letting the wine swirl all around the edges of the glass. "How are its 'legs'?", she would inquire. "Are they light, 'watery', vanishing quickly back down into the wine? Or are they thicker, heavier, heartier, leaving a residue on the glass near the top?" Legs had to do with the wine's viscosity, its tannins, and its type. We soon learned to appreciate a wine's 'legs'.

She would then ask one of us to please stand, take a careful swallow, and after letting the wine flow over the tongue and mouth, arousing various taste buds, the designated student was to tell her their opinion of it. We initially had little idea of what to say, but she would gently draw us out with her questions. "How are its legs? What do you think of its aroma? Its flavor? Do you get a sense of fruitiness? Or a tannic acid undertone? ... Or perhaps a faint nuance of mushrooms

continued on next page

MME. SUCZEK *continued from page 7*

or woods?" I found all of this fascinating. I learned a great deal about wine from Mme. Suczek.

The recipes she presented varied greatly, coming from all over the world. They reflected not only her own training and her years of taking classes from famous chefs around the world, but also her lengthy experience in entertaining at upper echelons of society. She had married a man of Czech background, Robert Suczek, who was a high-level engineer at Ford Motor Co. in Dearborn. They had entertained frequently, and her reputation had grown quickly, not only as a cook, but also as a *raconteur*. After her husband died in the 1950s, she had begun to teach cooking classes in the Detroit area.

I soon learned how to make dishes that I had once only dreamed of, such as a recipe for basil pesto from an Italian duke friend of Charity's. Today everyone knows of basil pesto, but in 1969 it was something unusual to almost all of us. Some further examples are beef carbonnade, Székely goulash, lobster bisque, Champagne chicken with baby shrimp and mushrooms, Linzer torte, puff pastry, dozens of excellent soups, quiches, Peking duck, Charlotte russe, etc., etc.

For nine years I attended her classes. After the first class, I became a devoted disciple. In the second year, she asked me if I would do all of the food shopping for her, plus help her prep the recipes for class. I could have fainted with joy!

And so began some of the most important years of my life. I became a part of Mme. Suczek's inner circle of four apprentices. We worked together, became lasting friends, even eating lunch at her house periodically. She would come to our houses for lunches and meetings. I learned so much from her, but what I am most grateful for, aside from her friendship and knowledge gained, is that she taught me how to taste food. She developed my taste buds. She taught me how to taste a dish and know what it needed to bring it to its best flavor. And technique... we all learned a great deal of technique.

A Lasting Impact

This ability has served me well in all of my culinary endeavors since that time. In my seventh year with Mme. Suczek, my husband became ill and was unable to work. When she found this out, she asked if I would be interested in working at Tweeney's, a renowned local restaurant. Mme. Suczek had called the chef-owner and asked if they needed someone good to work there. I jumped at the chance to not only earn some needed money, but to possibly learn to make some of the recipes in their repertoire. And I did learn. I

A notice for a gourmet club led by Mme. Suczek, from "The Woman's Page" of the *Grosse Pointe [Michigan] News*, March 10, 1966.

n All of th

Gourmets Plan Second Series

So enthusiastic are the members of the Grosse Pointe War Memorial's Gourmet Club that they are beginning another series of preparation and tasting sessions at the center starting tonight, Thursday, March 10, at 7:30.

Under the guidance of Mme. Charity de Vicq Suczek, gourmet members will in the ensuing six weeks session of Thursday night meetings, gather in the Center's kitchen to learn the enjoyment of cooking with wine, find out the utensils needed for gourmet cooking, and learn how to make the best use of the appliances they have.

They will learn how to make the best of herbs and spices. Most of all they will learn how to prepare gourmet delights for guests without having help and without remaining in the kitchen.

The Gourmet Club is of necessity very limited in its membership but it is open to Pointers both men and women who wish to develop their art of fine cookery. The Center's office will be glad to process any applications.

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also gained additional friendships, one of which led to a job later on, working in yet another well-regarded area restaurant, The Great Dane, led by Chef Douglas Douglas. Again, I kept learning new dishes and new techniques. I loved it.

A few years later, based on my growing reputation, I was asked to teach cooking classes at Kitchen Glamour and its four branches. It was a well-known kitchen supply store, famous for the classes they offered. I taught there for several years. All of these jobs I got because of what I had learned from Mme. Suczek.

When we moved to Chelsea, MI, in 1978, our realtor found out I was a chef and asked me to please volunteer my services to help prepare the traditional Afterglow Dinner that was offered following a local theatrical production. Attendees raved about the food as well as my presentation of it. Three women came up to me and asked if I would cater for a wedding they were planning.

I was honored. I was delighted. I was petrified! I had never catered before. I knew nothing about catering, yet

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RAISING MY CHANCES OF SUCCESS



FORTY YEARS OF BREAD MAKING

by Philip M. Zaret

Phil and his wife Barbara are longtime CHAA members. He was raised in the New York City area, majored in Classics at the University of Michigan, and made a living as the owner-manager of a local photocopy shop. Phil also worked for over 10 years as a volunteer at UM, where he bound and repaired library books and developed an index of culinary references found in manuscripts at the William L. Clements Library. His last article for Repast was "The Hill Family Manuscripts: Dining in a Wealthy Western Home" (Summer 2013).

In the early 1970s, shortly after getting married, I was in a transition period between school and work. My wife was working full-time, so I found myself in charge of cooking the daily meals.

I did not find cooking very interesting, but I quickly found I had a passion for making bread. This, of course, was not a necessity. If one desired something besides an industrial, packaged loaf of sliced white bread, there were a few bakeries in town one could resort to. But there was just something about the slow-developing process of creating a loaf—much like clay sculpture—that appealed to me. After three or four hours of labor and waiting, like taking an urn out of a kiln, one had a piece of edible art.

For cooking in general, I assembled a large collection of recipes clipped from discarded magazines. (This collection eventually ran into the tens of thousands.) I tried to follow the recipes as closely as I could. Sometimes I would have to find a substitute ingredient when the pantry was deficient. Or I'd simply leave an ingredient out. I quickly realized that with cooking, there is tremendous flexibility—and predictability. Unless you did something egregious—like adding a half-cup of pepper instead of a half-teaspoon, or not having enough liquid in the pan, resulting in a burnt, inedible mass—your end result, if not stunning, was at least edible.

But bread baking was different. I found that even following the directions as scrupulously as is humanly possible was not a guarantee of success, and experimentation was almost always a guarantee of failure. I have no doubt that other people's initial attempts at bread making might be equally frustrating, and being unwilling to face repeated failure, they might purchase a bread machine. But bread machines, in my mind, are a gimmick and enforce limitations that are unacceptable to the baking artist.

Bread baking, and many other types of baking, takes practice. When you cook on the stove, you add ingredients one by one and can see, taste, and adjust the results as you go along. But with bread-making you cannot taste your work until it is complete. You can smell it, however, and that is often an indication of the results of your labor. Another indication, before the baking begins, is "feel". How does the dough feel to your hands? Is it springy? Is it hard to knead, like dry clay? Does it stick to the work surface? Or is it too slimy to handle? All these conditions are important to take note of. After 40 years of bread making, I can pretty much predict what the final loaf will be like the minute the dough hits the work surface and I begin to knead. This cannot be taught. Only practice and experience is your guide.

The Pea Bread Fiasco

I will begin with one of my notable failures: Pea Bread. I had the desire to combine two food groups—grains and vegetables. The loaf itself was standard white bread. However, I attempted to incorporate a can of peas. The big mistake (besides the very idea of making Pea Bread) was to incorporate the entire can, perhaps 14½ ounces. Had I measured out a smaller amount, it might have worked, but I didn't want leftover peas sitting in the refrigerator and eventually thrown out.

The result can be described as a dark green, heavy, soggy, unbaked log. I could not convince my wife to try it. I did try it and concluded to deep-six it entirely. There was simply no way to salvage it. Nevertheless, I did salvage something: wisdom. The lesson learned was that there is a delicate balance between liquid and solid ingredients in bread making.

Had I deviated from the basic recipe for white bread by simply adding a few more cups of flour—creating a gigantic loaf, or two loaves—I might have had edible bread. But I had only one small bread pan at the time. And adding extra flour was no guarantee; the heaviness of the peas, for instance, might have overwhelmed the single packet of yeast I used.

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BREAD MAKING*continued from page 9*

Creating a Womb for the Yeast

Unhappily, too much liquid is not the only major hazard in bread making. The trickiest factor is yeast. Why? Because it is “alive”. It is a microscopic fungus that lies dormant in a little packet, only to spring to life in a warm, nutritious environment. Not only is it brought out of hibernation, but it begins to “breathe out” carbon dioxide gas, which spreads through the dough in the form of bubbles. These bubbles are what raise and lighten, or *leaven*, the loaf. But bringing yeast to life and keeping it alive are both matters of some subtlety.

One must “proof” yeast— or at least one should, if one wants to enhance one’s chances of success. Oh, you could throw your yeast into the flour with the other ingredients— which I have done— and most of the time it will work. But, do you need that uncertainty? I don’t. Instead, follow the directions given on 99.9% of bread-making recipes by dissolving the yeast in warm water with a little sugar, and let it bloom. Within 5 minutes— usually— you will see the yeast develop a “head” like a fine beer; this means it’s fermenting and giving off gas, just as it’s supposed to. When you get a “head” that’s about the same height as the liquid it’s floating on, it is ready to use. Don’t let the yeast sit there in the liquid too long or it will begin to lose its “pop”.

And how warm should the water be? Like Goldilocks’s porridge, not too warm and not too cold. I run the water from the tap onto my fingers or wrist until it becomes a little too hot for comfort, then I stick a two-cup glass measuring-cup under the stream and fill it to the half-cup level. (The two-cup size allows plenty of room for the yeast foam.) Remember, as soon as the water hits the room-temperature cup, it will cool a little. I immediately add the yeast (from a packet or from a package of bulk yeast). I add half a teaspoon of white sugar and stir it all together.

Warmth and moisture are like the womb to yeast. Anything you can do to create these two conditions will bring you a greater chance of success. Cold or even cool water won’t kill the yeast, but it will take way too long to bring it to life. Is it possible for the water to be so hot that it will kill the yeast? Probably. If you’ve ever had the hot water tap at maximum, you know you can come close to scalding your hands, so just don’t let it get that hot. It might not kill the yeast at that temperature (these days, there are commercial yeasts that seem to be almost unkillable), but why take the chance?

Getting the Liquid Ratio Right

I use the 2-cup glass measuring-cup that I mentioned above because I want to know exactly how much liquid I have. Why so obsessive? I repeat: the amount of liquid in relation to the amount of dry ingredients is the clearest touchstone for assuring the eventual success of a loaf.

After years of experimentation, I found that I can make a good-sized loaf of bread with 12 ounces of liquid. In the total of 12 ounces— a cup and a half— the yeast mixture is already half a cup, so you must be as careful as possible to add only one more cup of liquid beyond the yeast mixture.

This is not as easy as it appears. If you were adding only water, you might be able to measure exactly. But other liquids added in small quantities, such as eggs, molasses, honey, malt syrup, shortening, juice, or caramel color, can make exact measurement difficult. Try to get it as close as you can to a total of 12 ounces. If you add extra liquid beyond the 12 ounces, then you must add more dry ingredients, namely flour. If you have too much liquid and you don’t want a mega-loaf or two loaves, pour out some of the liquid and save yourself the embarrassment of your own Pea Bread fiasco.

How much “dry” must you use together with the 12 ounces of liquids? One of my initial perplexities was the almost universal recipe direction along the lines of, “Add 3½-4 cups of flour, depending...” Depending on what? Conditions? Altitude? Sun spots? Or, “Add enough flour to make a dough that’s springy to the touch.” These are *inexact* directions. But, unfortunately, for reasons noted above, when it comes to directions for baking bread the honest recipe writer must be *inexact*. (On the other hand, directions for bread machines can be exact because these devices have built-in controls to deal with slight variables. What you get, however, is always “average” bread— bread, as I see it, without character.)

Think of a loaf of bread like a hot-air balloon. It’s mostly empty space, yet it can support a good deal of weight— up to a point. The weight comes in two forms— liquid and solid. The liquid ingredients must be used sparingly: besides the possibility of overwhelming the flavor of the bread, they are like heavy rubber bands suppressing the yeast’s ability to give off gas and lighten the loaf. As for solid weight, buckwheat and rye flour— in fact, almost all grains besides white flour— must also be used sparingly because they have little or no gluten, a protein that

promotes bubble formation. For a sufficiently light loaf, the solution is to use a ratio of three parts white flour to one part other flours or grains. Normally, then, “whole-wheat bread” is not wholly whole wheat—it’s mostly refined white flour. You might not get all the nutrition, but it’s better than throwing out a loaf that doesn’t work.

Things like nuts and raisins are in a separate category, because they don’t absorb liquid. These additions sort of “float” in the medium of the dough. Naturally you don’t want to add too much of these or the loaf will fall apart. For an average loaf, I add as much as a total of two cups of these ingredients.

Getting a Rise Out of Dough

Instructions for leavening the dough often say, “Raise till double in bulk.” Depending on conditions, however, this can be either like watching a balloon steadily inflating or like watching the grass grow. And

it might never double: some doughs don’t have enough “pop” for this.

My rule of thumb is this: unless you have inadvertently killed the yeast, your dough will rise sufficiently in 1-2 hours. (If, after 2 hours, the dough hasn’t doubled, then you probably won’t get a fully risen bread once you bake it, although it will almost certainly rise some more during the baking.) The trick is simply to provide optimal conditions for the yeast to thrive. Proof the yeast in warm water; don’t add anything cold to the dough, so bring refrigerated ingredients to room temperature, or microwave them; and raise the dough in a warm environment.

To warm up my dough-raising bowl, I run hot tap-water into it, then dry it out and put it into an even larger bowl containing a small amount of hot tap-water. Then I put the two bowls in a cold oven and run the oven for 20 seconds before turning it off. I let the

continued on next page

Basic Loaf

½ cup warm water
2¼ teaspoons yeast (one packet)
½ teaspoon sugar
3½-4 cups flour
1 teaspoon salt
2 Tablespoons shortening
1 cup of liquid

Put yeast in warm water, add sugar, stir and let proof. Use stand mixer or mix by hand. Put in bowl 1 cup flour, add salt and mix. Add shortening and mix. Add proofed yeast and 1 cup of liquid and mix well. Add 2 cups flour and mix.

Add enough of remaining flour to form a slightly sticky dough ball. Too much flour will make the dough too dry; it will be hard to knead and probably will not rise much. The stickiness of the dough will go away as you knead it. If you used a stand mixer, you will probably only have to knead 10 times; if mixed by hand, you will have to knead 15 times. By knead, I mean press the dough flat and fold it to repeat.

Form dough into ball. Take a good-sized bowl, run hot tap water into it, pour out water, and dry the bowl. With paper towel, apply a *tiny* amount of shortening to inside of bowl. Rub the top (unseamed) surface of the dough ball in the grease, set the ball in the bowl seam-side down, and cover the bowl with plastic wrap. (Greasing the top surface of the dough ever so slightly

in this way prevents it from sticking to the plastic while rising. Too much shortening won’t let the dough surfaces join, and you’ll probably end up with big holes in your bread.)

Run a small amount of hot tap water into a larger bowl. Immerse the smaller bowl in the larger. Put bowls in oven. Place oven timer at 61 minutes and turn oven on. When you hear the oven start, count off 20 seconds, then turn oven off. When the timer goes off after an hour, your bread should be risen; if not risen enough, repeat at 30-minute intervals.

Remove dough from oven, punch it down, and roll into a rectangle somewhat longer than the length of your bread pan. Roll dough up tightly to prevent air pockets, and pinch the seam together. Pull up ends and pinch them tight. Flip over seam-side down and do a little pre-pan shaping. Grease the bread pan and place dough seam-side down. Press dough flat and push into corners. The more “preening” you do before baking, the better-looking the loaf. Dough should fill pan about half to two-thirds of the way up—any more and it will spill inelegantly over the sides during baking.

Put plastic wrap loosely over pan and raise as above for half an hour. After raising, remove plastic, put in cold oven and bake at 350° F. for 40 minutes. When baked, remove from pan onto cooling rack. Wait at least 3 hours before slicing bread, or it will tear and dry out. The loaf can also be placed in a bag and frozen.

BREAD MAKING*continued from page 11*

dough continue to rise in the oven for an hour. For safety's sake, I have a pre-written slip of paper with scotch tape saying, "Bread Raising", which I keep near the oven. This prevents you or someone else from inadvertently turning the oven on during the one-hour rise. Believe me, this has happened!

After this first rise, do you then punch it down and raise it again? Yes, but not in the same bowl. I raise it in the bread-baking pan, because the second rise should give you a pretty accurate indication of what the loaf will look like when done. After it has risen in the pan, I put it in a cold oven and bake at 350° F. for 40 minutes (your time and temperature will depend slightly on your oven). From a cold oven, the loaf should rise further as the baking begins, but without over-rising, collapsing, splitting awkwardly, or baking inconsistently, all of which are risks if you attempt the "shock" of putting a cold loaf in an already-hot oven.

A Real *Pain* to Deal With

My recipe on the previous page, called "Basic Loaf", is a great starting point. I have made a hundred different kinds of bread over the years, and this is the "mother" recipe.

Think of the Basic Loaf as a store-window mannequin, something you can dress up in infinite ways with only small changes. For instance, for whole-wheat bread, substitute 1 cup of whole wheat flour; for rye, do likewise. If you want a heartier whole wheat, add wheat germ or milled flax seed. For a chewier loaf, use bread flour instead of all-purpose. If you want it even chewier, add 2-3 tablespoons vital wheat gluten. If you want a really light loaf, use all-purpose flour and don't knead it. For a smoother texture, add half a cup of non-fat dry milk. For French *pain ordinaire*, leave out the shortening.

What about sourdough? It's a great flavor, but a real pain to deal with. Some people say it's not a big deal for such a unique-tasting loaf. True, but sourdough is like having a furry pet to take care of: you need to feed it daily, and constantly throw away the excess. This is fine if you bake sourdough bread frequently, but if you do so once every six months, to my mind maintaining sourdough sponge is not worth the effort. You can buy commercial "sourdough flavor" to add with your dry ingredients. It's not as tasty as the real thing but it works, sort of.

Here are some more of my favorite breads and how I achieve them. For a deli rye, I add caraway seeds and molasses. For health bread, I add multi-grain flour. For *challah* (egg braid), I add sugar and eggs. For Swedish

bread I add orange juice. For raisin-nut bread, I add cinnamon and sugar. For Russian black bread, I add whole wheat and rye flour, ground caraway seeds, caramel color, and a small amount of onion powder.

Your dough doesn't have to go into a pan. You can bake a free-form loaf, but be warned: homemade free-form breads tend to splay outwards, resulting in a flattish loaf. If you can buy, or make, something like an oversize French bread pan, you can get the proper roundish shape without too much splaying.

Sameness amid the Variability

If you're concerned that all your loaves will come out the same, as with a bread machine, I can assure you they won't. I've described some of the variables that you have control over, and some that you don't; these create variety in your loaves.

Sameness, or predictability, isn't necessarily bad when it comes to bread making. People have said they love the texture of my breads. I take that as a measure of quality, not a criticism of sameness.

These days, I usually make only one loaf at a time, as there are fewer of us around to eat it. A good-sized loaf of bread has about 15-20 slices (depending on thickness), enough to supply us for a week or two. When we had kids at home, however, I usually made two loaves, and most bread recipes are written to produce two loaves of bread for a standard bread pan. Of course, if you want only one loaf, you can halve the recipe, but the shape of the pan is a problem: it's too wide for a single loaf, and you would end up with overly wide slices of bread. There are slender bread pans, but you are required to adjust the recipe to fit this non-standard pan. There's also an adjustable pan, made in Germany, which costs something like \$140 with shipping. About 30 years ago I was able to buy one in this country, but for some exasperating reason they stopped selling them here. I still have that pan. It's all bent and scarred and soot-covered, but it still works.

After 40 years of bread making, I still produce less than perfect loaves. My wife says I am the only one who can perceive the imperfections. As the bread maker, I have various ideals in mind when I set about my work, which I often don't achieve, but I'm certain my wife is thinking, compared to Pea Bread, almost any loaf I make is a success. ■

A BITTER LOSS: JOHN THOMSON PASSES AWAY

We were heartbroken to suddenly lose John Thomson, 70, one of our most prominent and veteran members. He died on August 16 from a toxic reaction to a new chemotherapy drug. John leaves behind his wife Carroll (CHAA President during 2001-12), a brother and a sister, two sons, two daughters, and six granddaughters.

John was one of the most helpful, gentle, and likeable men one could ever meet. At CHAA meetings and much more generally, he was always there to lend a helping hand (quite literally), to contribute to discussion, and to help further everyone's knowledge, including his own.

John Corbett Thomson, Sr., was born on July 26, 1943, in Kansas City, MO. An automotive engineer, he moved to Ann Arbor, MI, in 1972, and married Carroll (née Lanzen) in 1976. He was heavily involved with launching Ford's Mustang GT and Thunderbird models, helped establish emissions test procedures to comply with EPA standards, and later contributed to clean alternative-fuel systems for cars. John also had auto-related hobbies, notably the racing of dragsters, sports cars, and vintage cars.

For years, John and Carroll owned and operated two eateries in northeast Ann Arbor, Carroll's Corner and the Trellis Café and Tea Room. Together they enjoyed growing vegetables and other plants at their home on the west side of town, learning about foods and culinary history, and traveling across the U.S. and overseas.

Both of them volunteered for many years as docents in support of the Janice Bluestein Longone Culinary Archives at the University of Michigan Libraries, where they made huge contributions. John developed the first extensive online directory of menus and charity cookbooks searchable by culinarily-relevant data. He also helped to organize and digitize collections of culinary advertising ephemera and graphics.



For the CHAA, John and Carroll were co-presenters of talks on "The Social and Cultural History of Coffee" (Jan. 1986) and "The Docents Speak: The Making of a Culinary Archive, Clements Library, Univ. of Michigan" (Sep. 2001). At their home, they hosted participatory theme meals focused on the bicentennial of American cookbooks (Dec. 1996), the foods of the Impressionists (Jul. 1998), Tuscany (July 2000), Spanish *tapas* (Dec. 2001), and Mexico (Dec. 2002).

A small example of John's impact on the CHAA occurred in August 2011 at our "Dining Along Route 66" theme meal. John came early to the meeting hall to help set up, then sat down informally with those who'd arrived and chatted at length, exchanging memories of traveling on Route 66. For him, it had started when he was a boy, and his family would drive the route from Missouri to California every year to visit the parents of his father, Albert Thomson. John's personal recollections made the whole experience around that theme meal much richer, as reflected in the write-up (*Repast*, Fall 2011).

Despite the richness of his experiences, from high technology to travel, he never grew jaded, and seemed to take an interest in literally everything. John had an intense curiosity and intellect about the world and about life. These are the key ingredients for any culinary historian.

SANDS OF THE SAHARA

The cuisines of North Africa formed the ambitious theme of the Culinary Historians' latest participatory meal, a biannual tradition that we've carried on for more than two decades. Thirty members got together for the event last July 14 at the Ladies' Literary Club in Ypsilanti, MI.

Thanks to CHAA member Phil Zaret for dreaming up the "Sands of the Sahara" theme and for orchestrating the whole affair:

- Participants brought a total of two dozen dishes of various kinds, which they'd selected themselves, researched, and prepared by their own hands.
- Strains of the region's varied music played on the sound system, from the Egyptian chanteuse Ūmm Kalthoum to the Malian bluesman Ali Farka Toure and the Algerian *rai* artist Cheb Khaled.
- Member Marvin Brandwin read us his *à propos* poem, "Ethnic Food Fantasy".
- A slideshow of photos from throughout the region, created by member Mariam Breed, who grew up in Casablanca, ran continuously on a laptop screen at the buffet table.
- The dining tables themselves were decorated with objects from North Africa (and explanatory card tents), such as a decorative plate from Safi, Morocco, a simple cup from the metal-smiths' quarter of Kairouān, Tunisia, a clay honey-pot from Chefchaouen in the northern Rif Mountains of Morocco, packages for saffron, cane sugar, and *deglet nour* dates, and a trilingual menu from a fine restaurant in Marrakech.

By collectively preparing and eating a wide variety of authentic foods and dishes, we learned and tasted how modern North African cuisine is an amalgam of customs derived from Berber and other indigenous cultures together with those brought by outsiders. The latter include Greco-Roman, Christian, classical Arab-Muslim, Andalusian, Sephardic, Ottoman, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, French, British, and other international influences. Although the list of elements is dizzying, in the end they live well together to create an elegant fusion of cultures and cuisines, what the Andalusians call a *convivencia*.



Photos: Mariam Breed

Fruits of Africa

The whole of Africa today abounds with fruits, some of them indigenous and others introduced by successive waves of new settlers and colonials. Such fruits, fresh or dried, make a wonderful start or finish to a fine repast.

A watermelon and orange salad with fresh mint, contributed to our meal by Mary Bilyeu and Craig Rochkind, combines two of the continent's most famous indigenous and introduced fruits, respectively. The primeval watermelon of the Kalahari Desert was rather bitter, but its consumption expanded northward and up the Nile River valley. It became much sweeter with its domestication in the Mediterranean and in India, and starting in the 800s Arab and Moorish settlers spread its cultivation across North Africa and into Europe via Spain. The customary Arabic term for a fruit and vegetable market was "the watermelon house", *dar al-biṭṭīkh*.

The bitter and sweet oranges of Asia also diffused through North Africa after the arrival of Islam in the 600s. In fact, two varieties of mandarin have specific associations with the Maghreb, or Northwest Africa: the tangerine (Morocco) and the Clementine (Algeria). To make *maskouta*, or Moroccan orange and almond cake [Laura and Dan Gillis], for our meal, Laura stewed the sweet, seedless oranges for two hours before removing and puréeing them, rind and all. Interestingly, no flour or butter is used in the cake; the only other ingredients are caster sugar, eggs, almond meal, and baking powder. Laura adapted a simple but scrumptious recipe from Maeve O'Meara's "Food Safari" TV series.

A magnificent multi-tiered display of fruits [Jan and Dan Longone] featured *deglet nour* dried dates imported from Tunisia, as well as *medjool* dried dates, fresh black figs, fresh and dried apricots, Champagne grapes, and a medley of jumbo raisins. *Deglet nour* means "finger of light"; this type of date was portrayed as translucent in ancient mosaics made when Tunisia was under Roman rule. Tozeur, a town in southern Tunisia, celebrates an annual date-harvest festival in the last week of December. It sits in the middle of a huge grove of *deglet nour*



Jan and Dan Longone's multi-tiered display of fruits

date palms nourished by an oasis, and for centuries this grove was the focus of life in the area, its land and water meticulously portioned out to families and later to commercial growers. *Maqrūd* is a Tunisian pastry of semolina dough stuffed with date paste and drenched in a syrup of honey and sugar. It is an old specialty of Kairouān, in central Tunisia, a major political and intellectual center from the 7th to the 11th Century and still considered Islam's fourth holiest site, after Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem.

Some of the fruits introduced to Africa in later centuries feature in a salad from Niger [Phil and Barbara Zaret] that combines mango, pineapple, and strawberries, as well as lemon and apricot juices. The mango, for example, which is indigenous to India, was brought by Portuguese traders and colonists in the 1500s to tropical Africa, where it grows well. The mango and pineapple aren't grown in dry Niger, but they're imported from Nigeria, just to the south, which leads the entire continent in producing both of the fruits.

Gifts from Asia

In addition to the fruits noted earlier, the Arabs bestowed upon northern Africa a variety of Asian spices such as *za'atar*, *summāq*, and cumin; vegetables such as spinach and eggplant; grains such as rice and durum wheat; and, perhaps most influential of all, cane sugar. The resulting food customs still dominate the region.

Za'atar spice blend is an age-old Middle Eastern mixture of *za'atar* (dried wild thyme or "mountain oregano"), *summāq* (a tart red powder made from dried sumac berries), and whole sesame seeds. Pita-type flatbreads [Pat Cornett and Mel Annis] baked with a topping of olive oil and *za'atar* mixture are a traditional breakfast food in the Arab world, often accompanied by cheese and olives. Pat used a recipe in Paula Wolfert's *The Cooking of the Eastern Mediterranean*, and substituted dried marjoram for

the wild thyme. She also used *za'atar* mixture in an improvised lentil dip, along with onion, garlic, lemon juice, and parsley.

Cumin and curry powder were two of the spices used to make a chicken-peanut stew [Judy Steeh] of the sort that is popular in Mali, Niger, Chad and other north and central African countries. Judy snagged the recipe a long time ago from her friend's African friend. It also incorporates ingredients from the New World that quickly made themselves at home in Africa: the peanut, the tomato, and the chili pepper. Judy accompanied the dish with white rice and hard-boiled egg slices; other suggested accompaniments include mango chutney, fried banana, and coconut. Stews such as this— one-dish meals, but soupy enough to be thought of as thick soups— are a staple in Central Africa. The leading actor in such a dish is often not meat but starchy dumplings, made from semolina or from ground millet, sorghum, corn, cassava, cocoyam, or yam. The dumplings are called *to* in Mali, and *fofoo* to the south and east.¹

Semolina, just mentioned, is also used to make boiled doughs (pastas) and certain baked doughs. Semolina pasta is extremely common in North Africa today, in the form of *couscous* as well as various sorts of noodles. The best type of grain for semolina is the durum, or hard, variety of wheat that arrived in the Islamic era. But centuries before durum arrived, Berbers were making *couscous* from other cereals, such as barley, millet, and *fonio*. In fact, the very word *couscous* is a Berber one. It appears, then, that the custom of drying pasta for later use, which is a premiere way to preserve grain, had already taken hold in Africa before the Arabs arrived with their durum wheat— but durum would quickly "corner the market" as far as making *couscous* is concerned. The pre-Islamic existence of *couscous* in North Africa also accords with the fact that this particular form of pasta is traditional there but not in the Islamic East.

The large-gauge type of *couscous*, with balls of diameter 3-4 mm., was chosen to accompany a Moroccan chicken *tagine* [Fran Lyman]. This less-familiar type of *couscous* is called *mhamṣa* ("toasted") in Morocco and Algeria, and *maghribiyya* ("far western") in Tunisia and points further east. In preparing her dish, in addition to chicken Fran includes vegetables such as onion, tomato, carrot, and zucchini-type squash, and she tops it with a sweet sauce, usually called *tafaya*, made of raisins, onions, chickpeas, and cinnamon, all caramelized in sugar. Fran, who wore her light, strikingly white *gūndūra* to the meal, learned this dish from her friend Rachida when Fran worked for the Peace Corps in Martil, on the Mediterranean coast of Morocco, in the late 1990s.

We were treated to another Moroccan chicken *tagine*, called *tagine msīr zītūn* [Sherry Sundling], featuring lemons and green olives. The recipe is from the Time-Life *Quintet of Cuisines* cookbook. Sherry, who is very resourceful, made do with fresh lemons because she couldn't locate any of the preserved kind. The preserved lemon is an important and versatile part of fine cuisine in Morocco, where it's known colloquially as *msīr* or *msayir*.

As with our words "dish" and "casserole", the word *tagine* is the name of both a cooking vessel and its cooked product. The classic *tagine ṣlaoui* is a shallow, round ceramic dish with an accompanying large, tight-fitting conical lid. As the food cooks

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slowly on the bottom in an unctuous liquid (typically water with oil, butter, or other fat added), it sends up steam that humidifies the dried pellets of *couscous* that have been placed on a finely-perforated platform just above. A bit of the steam vents through a hole at the apex of the lid, but most hits the unglazed inside surface and either is absorbed by the clay or condenses on it, rolling back down to the simmering food and completing a cycle. Unlike the Central African soup-stews mentioned earlier, the food in a *tagine* ends up moist and perhaps resting in a sauce, but not soupy; most of the cooking liquid ends up absorbed. This type of Berber stew and stew-pot, well-adapted to North Africa's scarce fuel and water resources, had probably evolved from earlier cooking implements during the period of Greco-Roman colonization; in fact, the word *tagine* derives from the Greek *tēganon*, a large frying-pan made of tinned copper.²

Fran's use of a sweet *tafaya* on her savory dish is a strikingly common feature of North African, especially Moroccan, cooking. For Muslims, refined white sugar came to symbolize the purity and sweetness of Paradise.³ Furthermore, in medieval Morocco, sugarcane production and processing was a lucrative royal cash-crop based on enslaved labor.⁴ By contrast, honey was a traditional, small-scale Berber product and came to symbolize humble eating. Thus, the use of sugar was spurred not only by its addicting flavor but by its cultural, spiritual, and economic significance.

Morocco today has the world's highest per-capita consumption of white sugar; some of it is now produced from sugar beets rather than cane. In addition to Laura's *maskouta* and the sweet topping on Fran's *tagine*, discussed above, sugar was also a key ingredient in two other Moroccan dishes at our meal:

- *khizzu m'chermel* [Margaret Carney and Bill Walker], a room-temperature salad of caramelized carrots taken from a page of Kitty Morse's *Cooking at the Kasbah: Recipes from My Moroccan Kitchen*. Red wine vinegar, garlic, sweet paprika, and parsley are also added.
- *roz bil hleeb* [Julie and Bob Lewis], a rice pudding made with the addition of milk, liquefied blanched almonds, sugar, cinnamon, butter, and orange-flower water. The recipe is found in Paula Wolfert's *Couscous and Other Good Food from Morocco*. Traditionally, this pudding could be prepared only with arduous pounding and grinding. It would be served, topped with dabs of butter, in an enormous circular bowl around which the diners were seated, each with a large spoon.

Note that neither of these sweetened dishes is a dessert *per se*. Wolfert instead classifies the pudding as a "pre-dessert", a type of dish, she writes, "often served after a rich and nourishing soup or a succession of meat or chicken *tagines*".

Jewish communities also thrived in North Africa for centuries, including under Muslim rule. Most major cities in the region still have one or more synagogues serving small congregations. A treasure-trove of 300,000 manuscript fragments from the *geniza*, or storeroom, of a synagogue in Old Cairo is one of the richest sources of information on the region's urban food customs and general cultural practices from the 9th through 19th Centuries. The scholar Shelomo Dov Goitein spent decades examining these documents for his six-volume study.

Motivated by their kosher dietary restrictions, Jews were often early adopters of newly-encountered foodstuffs from Asia (such as spinach and eggplant), Africa (*mulūkhīyya*, or "Jew's

Ethnic Food Fantasy

from Marvin Brandwin, *A Smorgasbord of Verse: Easy to Digest Food Poems* (Ann Arbor, MI: Charing Cross Press, 2009)

Eating the foods of a foreign land, especially if the cooking's authentic
 Can help a person to understand the narrowness of being ethnocentric.
 Although at first it may seem strange when unfamiliar tastes arrive,
 Broadening your eating range makes other cultures come alive.
 What you gain is more than caloric, for as your bias turns aside
 You'll experience a trip historic on a magic culinary carpet ride.

I once tried North African cuisine. How little then did I suspect
 Its spices would transform the scene by an altered time and space effect.
 Suddenly there rose before my eyes, very clearly though I have myopia
 The ancient land of Sheba, which lies between modern Yemen and Ethiopia.
 The Queen invited me to dine on couscous, lentils, lamb, and rice,
 And after dessert we discussed over wine whether King Solomon was really so nice.

And once I had Greek souvlaki to thank for fueling the carpet that carried me far,
 Or was it moussaka or the ouzo I drank or maybe the flaky dessert baklava.
 Whichever it was and there are many more, for the foods of Greek islands are myriad,
 I found myself on the same Trojan shore where battles raged in the *Odyssey* and *Iliad*.
 And while I evaded both armies' attacks, I tried to reduce low morale and defections
 By teaching Achilles to breathe deep and relax, and by giving Odysseus better directions.

mallow”), and the New World (squash, tomato, and haricot beans). Spinach, along with chicken and *matzo*, is a key ingredient in Egyptian *mayerena* [Randy Schwartz and Mariam Breed]. This pie is baked to commemorate Passover, the passage out of Egypt. *Matzo*, an unleavened bread, allowed the ancient Jews to flee quickly from the pharaoh’s captivity, and it allows their descendants to eat a grain product during a holiday when any other kind of dough (such as lasagna noodles) is strictly forbidden. Randy and Mariam followed a recipe from *Nile Style: Egyptian Cuisine and Culture* by Amy Riolo, a member of the Culinary Historians of Washington, DC. Her innovation of adding a tomato sauce, and her suggestion to bake in a casserole pan, accentuate the lasagna-like character of the dish. It is often made with ground lamb or beef instead of chicken.

Ottoman Influence

At least nine dishes at our meal bore the unmistakable “footprints” of the Ottoman Turks. Starting in the 1500s and lasting for more than three centuries, their rule extended across the northernmost portion of Africa (the Mediterranean coastal tier) as far west as the city of Algiers. They also briefly occupied parts of northernmost Morocco in the 1500s, long enough to leave an imprint on the cuisine there as well.

Many of the food customs imparted to North Africa by the Ottomans were those that had been brought by their nomadic Turkic ancestors when they migrated westward from Central Asia. One of the most emblematic of these customs is to prepare a spread of small dishes for guests— flatbreads, dips, pickles, nuts, stuffed grape or cabbage leaves, pastries— a form of hospitality known as *mezze* in Turkish and as *mazza*, *ādū*, or *qimīyya* in North Africa.

The Turkish diet leaned heavily on rice, *bulgur* or cracked wheat (loaned into Arabic as *burghul*), and such dairy and meat products as *yoghurt*, *feta*-style cheese, *kebab*, and *köfte*, an elongated ball of ground meat. Appearances of *yoghurt* at our meal included:

- beets in *yoghurt* [Pat Cornett and Mel Annis], a vibrant pink dip from Wolfert’s *The Cooking of the Eastern Mediterranean*. The beets are boiled and coarsely grated, seasoned, and mixed with garlic, lemon juice, and thick *yoghurt*, garnished with fresh mint.
- *yoghurt* drizzled on carrot soup [Laura and Dan Gillis], a Moroccan recipe from *Bon Appétit* (Apr. 2010, p. 53). The carrots are sautéed with onions in chicken broth, then puréed and combined with honey, lemon juice, and spices: cumin, allspice, and the renowned Moroccan blend *rās al-ḥānūt* (Laura found this at Spice Merchants, in the Kerrytown shops in Ann Arbor). The soup was garnished with fresh mint.

The Turks were also fond of making dishes of stuffed vegetables or stuffed leaves, called *dolma* and *sarma*, respectively (but in languages other than Turkish, *dolma* came to be used for the stuffed leaves only). Instances of Ottoman-style stuffing at our meal:

- *waraq ‘inab* [Gwen and John Nystuen], grape leaves stuffed with rice, ground beef, tomato, pinenuts, cinnamon, mint, and parsley, and garnished with lemon slices

- *bitingan imam biyaldi* (“the imam fainted” eggplant) [Marian and Nick Holt], an Egyptian transplant of the famous Turkish dish. Marion made her own meatless layered-casserole version with eggplant, tomato, onion, garlic, plenty of olive oil, and garnished with parsley. The more traditional Ottoman-inspired version is a stuffed eggplant, and incorporates ground beef, *yoghurt*, and pinenuts.

Ottoman savory and sweet pastries, now world-famous, are often made with the flaky dough called *yufka* (Turkish for “thin”), which in Greece was renamed *phyllo* (“leaf”). Our doughy creations:

- Egyptian *sanbūsak bil gebna* [Rita Goss] were triangular baked pastries of *phyllo* dough filled with spinach and *feta*. From Riolo’s aforementioned *Nile Style*.
- Egyptian *faṭā’ir bil sabānikh wa lahma* [Rita Goss] were triangular baked turnover pastries of bread dough stuffed with spinach and ground beef. Also from *Nile Style*.
- Moroccan lamb *brīwāt* [Eleanor Hoag] were triangular pastries of *phyllo* filled with ground lamb, egg, onion, garlic, cumin, turmeric, cinnamon, and coriander, and garnished with parsley. From Jeff Smith’s *The Frugal Gourmet on Our Immigrant Ancestors*.
- Sweet Moroccan almond *brīwāt* [Pam Dishman] were triangular baked pastries of *phyllo* filled with a paste of blanched almonds, sugar, and orange-flower water. The baked triangles were then bathed in a honey-syrup made fragrant with additional orange-flower water.
- *Ūmm ‘Ālī* (“Ali’s Mother”) [Lisa and Tony Putman] is an Egyptian baked pudding. It is attached to a legend that is set in a peasant village of the Nile delta during Ottoman times. The pudding is made with cream, sugar, raisins, crumbled stale *phyllo*-type dough, and assorted finely-ground nuts. Lisa used quartered almonds, and substituted croissant dough for the *phyllo*. She made two different variants, one made fragrant with rosewater and cardamom, another with orange-flower water and cinnamon.

The names of the above triangular pastries *sanbūsak*, *faṭā’ir*, and *brīwāt* (sometimes transliterated *sambousik*, *fatayer*, and *braewat* or *briouat*) are somewhat interchangeable today, but represent distinct regions and histories. The first two were diffused across the Middle East and North Africa by Arab Muslims. They were already common in the Fertile Crescent early in the Islamic era, having arisen in Persia and Mesopotamia, respectively (*sanbūsak* derives from a Persian word for “triangular”, and *faṭā’ir* from an Arabic word for “unleavened”). At that early stage, both were typically deep-fried in sesame oil (a practice still common with the *samosa*, the Indian descendant and namesake of *sanbūsak*). Moving into the modern era, *sanbūsak*, originally made from leavened dough, was the one more likely to be found on the *mazza* table for guests, while *faṭā’ir*, originally of unleavened dough, was the one more likely to be found on the breakfast table. Today, however, both are widely eaten as snacks and street foods.

And what about *brīwāt*? To create more-elegant pastries, Arabs in the Middle East had developed a paper-thin dough called

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NORTH AFRICA

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waraqā (“leaf”) during medieval times. It is made by repeatedly sliding a quantity of dough on the rounded surface of a metal pan kept hot over a brazier, leaving a thin film each time. However, after the advent of the Ottoman era, Turkish *yufka* (Greek *phyllo*) began to gradually replace this older *waraqā* tradition virtually everywhere. *Yufka / phyllo* is made in a different and more straightforward manner, by using a rolling pin to successively flatten and stretch a ball of dough on a flat surface.⁵ The genre of Ottoman *yufka / phyllo* pastry known as the *börek* inspired local adaptations in North Africa, which are called *brīk* in Tunisia, *būrak* in Algeria, and *brīwa* (plural *brīwāt*) in Morocco.

The beverage of choice at our meal was hot tea, especially sugar-sweetened tea infused with mint, which is a famous daily pleasure in Morocco and neighboring countries. But even the region’s tea-drinking habit shows the influence of the Turks— or at least some indirect responsibility on their part. Until the mid-1800s, tea-drinking was uncommon in North Africa, only an occasional treat for the wealthy. In 1853, the Ottomans declared war against Russian invaders. Britain, allying with Turkey in the ensuing Crimean War, found its northerly trade routes cut off by the Russian navy. This blockade prompted British tea merchants

to turn their attention southwards and to establish new markets in the Moroccan ports of Tangier and Mogador. The rest is history. ■

Endnotes: Related Articles in Repast

1. On the stews of Africa, see Apollos N. Bulo, “Out of Africa: Historic Soups and Stews from Nigeria” (*Repast*, Fall 1999), and the summary of Ann Evans Larimore’s talk on “Cuisine Traditions of Mali, an Islamic Country in the African Sahel” (Summer 2009).
2. On ancient food production in North Africa, see Randy K. Schwartz, “All Roads Led to Rome: Roman Food Production in North Africa” (*Repast*, Fall 2004).
3. On the status of sugar and other foods in medieval Islam, see Randy K. Schwartz, “Morocco as Culinary Bridge” (*Repast*, Summer 1999).
4. On medieval Moroccan sugar production, see Randy K. Schwartz, “Sugar of Barbary for the Queen’s Realm” (*Repast*, Fall 2010).
5. On the origin of *yufka / phyllo* dough, see Bruce Kraig, “Turkish *Yufka* and its Offspring” (*Repast*, Winter 2005).



Some of the flaky pastries at our meal. Left, Pam Dishman’s sweet Moroccan almond *brīwāt*; right, Rita Goss’s savory Egyptian *fatā’ir* of spinach and ground beef, and *sambūsak* of spinach and *feta*.

MORSELS & TIDBITS

CHAA member **Sherry Sundling** was a co-presenter in a program about Univ. of Michigan football, held on Nov. 17 at the Ann Arbor Senior Center as part of the Cultural Arts Series organized by the Ann Arbor Parks and Recreation Dept. Sherry related stories and personal experiences from the UM tailgate tradition, and served an example of tailgate cookery from her own recipe collection. Her co-presenter, **Jon Falk**, shared memories from his decades of work as UM Football Equipment Manager.

Member **Tanya Muzumdar** has recently begun writing for *Midwest Living* magazine. She is also an Asst. Editor for two local e-zines, *Concentrate* and *Metromode*.

Puzzled by the disappearance of some former CHAA stalwarts? Longtime CHAA member **Harriet Larson** recently moved to a nursing home in Illinois to be closer to her daughter. **Kay and Steve Oldstrom** moved to Brighton, MI, and spend much of their time in South Carolina.

Food-related exhibitions in our region include the following:

- CHAA member **Margaret Carney**, Director of the Dinnerware Museum (<http://www.dinnerwaremuseum.org>) in Ann Arbor, reports that the museum has mounted two further exhibits since its inaugural exhibition earlier this year in Ypsilanti. An exhibit at the Navy Pier in Chicago ran Oct. 31 – Nov. 3 as part of SOFA 2013 (Sculpture Objects Functional Art), an event that drew about 35,000 visitors. A second exhibit runs Dec. 6, 2013 to May 12, 2014 at Ann Arbor's Museum on Main Street, and has three "courses": Whetting Your Appetite (tabletop masterpieces created by designers and artists), Setting the Table (celebrity place settings), and Getting a Snack (luncheon snack sets).
- "Art and Appetite: American Painting, Culture, and Cuisine" is on display Nov. 12, 2013 to Jan. 27, 2014 in Regenstein Hall at the Art Institute of Chicago. The exhibit brings together over 100 paintings, sculptures, and decorative arts from the 18th through 20th Century, along with a selection of period cookbooks, menus, trade cards, and posters, to explore the art and culture of food and examine the many meanings and interpretations of eating in America. An online cookbook of historically-inspired recipes has been assembled by celebrated Chicago chefs (<http://extras.artic.edu/artandappetite>).
- Curator **Nicholas J. Hoffman** invites visitors to "Food: Who We Are and What We Eat", an exhibit continuing through Fall 2014 at the History Museum at the Castle, located in Appleton, WI. The exhibit features some of the most iconic food traditions of Wisconsin's Fox Cities area (Appleton/Oshkosh), including fish fries, frozen custard, cheese, sausage, lager beer, brandy old fashioned, and ethnic favorites. In addition, the exhibit highlights contributions to the food industry by a number of local companies, and background on several controversial food-related topics.

Brrr... With Winter upon us, we take note of three recent publications featuring frozen or otherwise frigid fare. But they're well-written, so there's no reason to give them the cold shoulder:

- *Birdseye: The Adventures of a Curious Man* (New York: Doubleday, 2013; 288 pp., \$25.95 hbk., \$15.95 pbk.) is the latest from well-known food writer Mark Kurlansky. Clarence Birdseye, a Brooklyn native romantically attracted to the cold wilderness, was working as a fur trapper in Labrador when he discovered a way to preserve food by fast-freezing with water; he called it "frosting". The resulting company struggled to find markets for its frozen products (mostly haddock) until the Depression year of 1929. That was when the firm, and more importantly, Birdseye's patents, were bought up by partners Goldman Sachs and Postum Foods for \$22 million. Between 1935 and 1948, Americans' consumption of fast-frozen foods would soar. The book also explores how Birdseye's genius led to discoveries and inventions in several other fields.
- *Ice Cream: A History* (Oxford, UK: Shire Publications, 2011; 64 pp., approx. \$11.50 pbk.) is by Ivan Day, the renowned English culinary historian, artist, curator, and broadcaster. It surveys the more than 300-year chronicle of ice cream in Britain, including narratives of fine cuisine and artistry, entrepreneurship, and mass appeal. The book is illustrated both with archival material and with photographs of historic ice cream desserts made from original recipes especially for the book.
- *Hoosh: Roast Penguin, Scurvy Day, and Other Stories of Antarctic Cuisine* (Lincoln, NE: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2012; 344 pp., \$26.95 pbk.) is by Jason C. Anthony, a veteran of eight seasons in the U.S. Antarctic Program. He relates true, entertaining, sometimes horrifying tales of the foods that sustained heroic expeditions to the frozen continent. Anthony writes that "cold, isolation and a lack of worldly alternatives have conspired to make Antarctica's captive inhabitants desperate for generally lousy food." Seal blubber, for example, or seal brains on toast (recipe included here), not to mention penguin breasts, and hoosh (a porridge of meat, fat, and melted snow, often thickened with ground biscuit). But there are also tales of wondrous ingenuity, such as a 1903 French expedition whose men ate fresh-baked bread three times a week, *croissants* twice a week, and at one point *crème brûlée* made from cormorant eggs.

We were saddened to learn of the recent deaths of two greats in the world of cooking. **Penelope Casas** (1943-2013), who passed away on Aug. 11, and **Marcella Hazan** (1924-2013), who passed away on Sep. 29, played instrumental roles in introducing Americans to authentic international cuisine. Casas, who came from a Greek-American background in Queens, NY, popularized Spanish gastronomy in a series of cookbooks beginning with *The Foods and Wines of Spain* (1982). Hazan grew up in an Italian family living in Emilia-Romagna and in Alexandria, Egypt; she and her husband, Victor Hazan, moved to America (to Queens, in fact) in 1955. *The Classic Italian Cook Book* (1973) was her first in a series of books explaining this food and its place in history and culture. Interestingly, both writers were "discovered" and brought to prominence through the efforts of **Craig Claiborne**, food writer for the *New York Times*. ■

CHAA CALENDAR

(Unless otherwise noted, programs are scheduled for 4:00-6:00 p.m. and are held at Ann Arbor Senior Center, 1320 Baldwin Ave.)

Sunday, January 19, 2014

Richard Andres and Deb Lentz speak on Tantré Farm, their certified organic family farm in Chelsea, MI.

Sunday, February 16, 2014

Attorney, author, and historian Martha Churchill speaks on the Great Sugar Scandal of 1888, an international grape-sugar scam based in Milan, MI.

On the Back Burner: We welcome ideas and submissions from all readers of *Repast*, including for the following planned future theme-issues. Suggestions for future themes are also welcome.

- Winter 2014: Jewish Baking
- Spring and Summer 2014: Quadricentennial of Dutch-American Cooking—
Part 1, The Hudson and Delaware Valleys
Part 2, The Great Lakes Region.

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