Volume XII Number 4 Fall 1996

ANN ARBOR CULINARY HISTORIANS

A Publication of the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

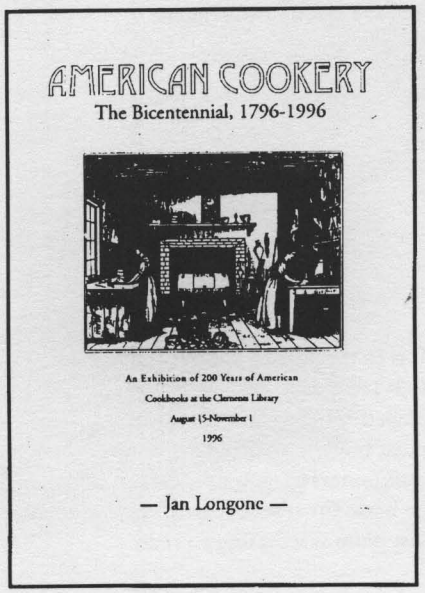
A Significant Exhibit

Assembling a collection of one important cookbook from each of the two hundred years since 1796 is the job Jan Longone undertook for a display at the University of Michigan Clements Library. She says that if she had known what she was getting into . . . We say that we are grateful for her effort and for her tremendous expertise.

Jan gave a talk at the library in September. The whole large main room of the first floor was filled with chairs, not one empty, and there were people standing at the door. With her usual verve, intelligence, and enthusiasm, Jan indicated the difficulty of all those hard choices and described some of the books on display.

The occasion for such celebration is, of course, the 200th anniversary of the publication of the first American cookbook, Amelia Simmons' *American Cookery* (Hartford, 1796). This year also marks the 100th year since Fannie Farmer's *Boston Cooking School Cook Book* (Boston, 1896), and so this fall's exhibit is a double observation of landmark years in American culinary history.

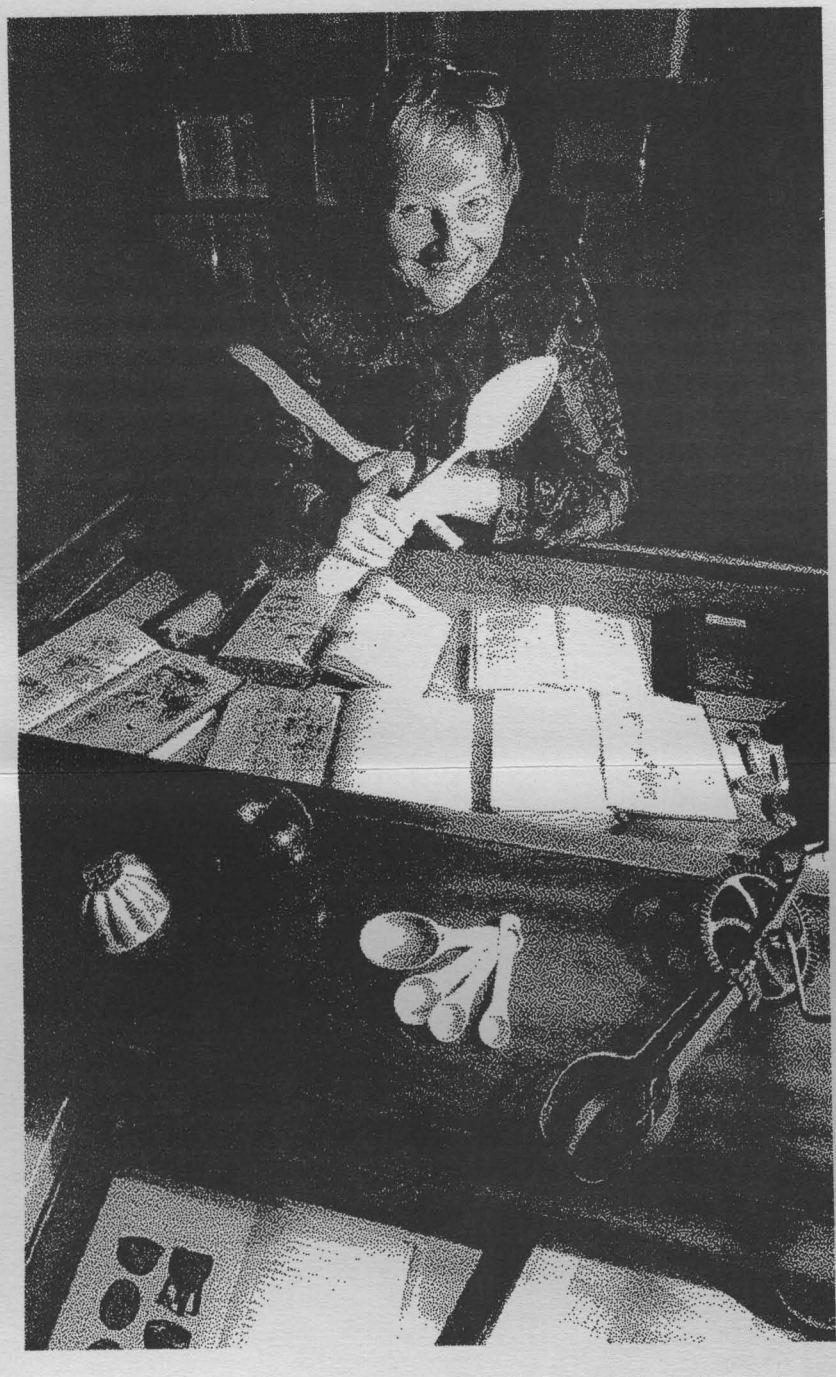
Judging from the number of alternates given for almost every year, the most difficult aspect of this project must have been making the choices: which book was most significant in that year and for what reason. Jan said in her talk that she would answer any question about the selections except why your own personal favorite was not included.



To browse the exhibit is to experience time travel. Everyone loves the recipe "To Make a Fine Syllabub From the Cow", which calls for the cow to be milked directly into a mix of cider, sugar and nutmeg (1796). We read recipes for a skin lotion (for there are such practical non-food instructions, too, in the early books) with "a pound of fresh butter" (1837); rice waffles (1847); snow griddle cakes ("one cup and a quarter of fresh, dry snow", 1891); reference to "one-pound baking powder boxes" (1896; who, today, has ever seen one?). There are also engravings of kitchen equipment, including stoves, some of which do not seem too unlike modern AGA's and commercial-type gas ranges.

Every kind of cookbook is included. In the earliest years, British cookery had a strong influence, not surprisingly. But by the 1840's, American authors were in firm competition. Many of these books on cookery were written by physicians (including Ann Arbor's Dr. A. W. Chase) and most of them discussed health concerns. Many also included suggestions for help with farm chores (churning, cheese making) and veterinary recipes. As time went on we got French cooking (1846) and table manners (1874), charity cookbooks, advertising pamphlets (Jello, 1914), regional cookbooks, ethnic cookbooks, cooking magazines (Berney's, 1868, was the first), and cookbook bibliographies.

It is natural to examine most carefully the books from recent years, with which we are most familiar. *Betty Crocker's Picture Cook Book*, chosen for 1950, is said to be "the single most requested cookbook at antiquarian bookshops." Before that, for the year 1947, *Let's Cook It Right* by Adelle Davis. M. F. K. Fisher is represented with *The Art of Eating* (1954); there are



To Make a Fine Syllabub

from "American Cookery" by Amelia Simmons (1796)

People who prefer more conventional drinks may be unfamiliar with syllabub. It's made by curdling milk or cream with an acid beverage such as wine of cider. Here's how it's done.

"Sweeten a quart of cyder with double refined sugar, grate nutmeg into it, then milk your cow into your liquor, when you have thus added what quantity of milk you think proper, pour half a pint or more, in proportion to the quantity of syllabub you make, of the sweetest cream you can get all over it."

The Williamsburg Art of Cookery (1955) and *Benjamin Franklin on the Art of Eating* (1958), showing that reprints and what one may call "antique or archaeological cookery" have always been popular. And there are Julia Child, James Beard, Barbara Kafka and many other well-known authors of the present day.

It is in the lists of alternates for each year that Jan's wide knowledge is really displayed. There is simply no help for it; one must buy the catalog! Because of the uniqueness of this exhibit, the catalog will be basic for research. Research aside, it is just plain fascinating to read.

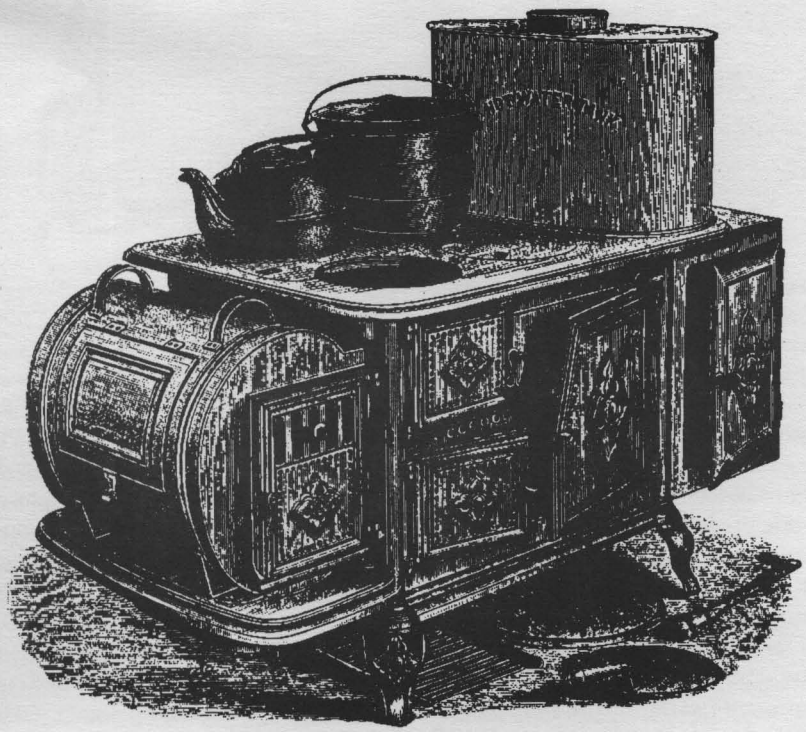
It can be ordered, even after the exhibition closes on November 1, from:
The Clements Library
University of Michigan
909 South University Street,
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109-1190
Phone: 313-764-2347
Copies are $8 by mail (or $5 at the library)

A.W.

The Famous Jennings Cookbook Coup

John Melvill Jennings, whom readers may remember as having contributed to the article on summer kitchens, wrote to thank me and to comment on the anniversary of the Amelia Simmons cookbook. He was director of the Virginia Historical Society for many years and acquired for the library of the Society a fine collection of Virginiana, including rare books.

In the 1960's an intact copy of an even earlier book was found in an attic on Virginia's Eastern Shore and came up at auction. He outbid Colonial Williamsburg for the book, *The Compleat Housewife: or, Accomplish'd Gentlewoman's Companion* by Mrs. Smith, knowing all the while that he had not a cent to pay for it. But fund raising was one of his skills and he issued a general appeal and also went to a favorite patron in Washington, who wrote a check, telling him at the same time that she had never been in a kitchen in her life. He offered, in the Society's bulletin, to toast contributors "with possets and fine syllabub." He says further, that the binding of the book needed repair and he had that done by a Williamsburg expert. This copy of the book is one of only five extant and he observes that even the Clements Library does not have one.



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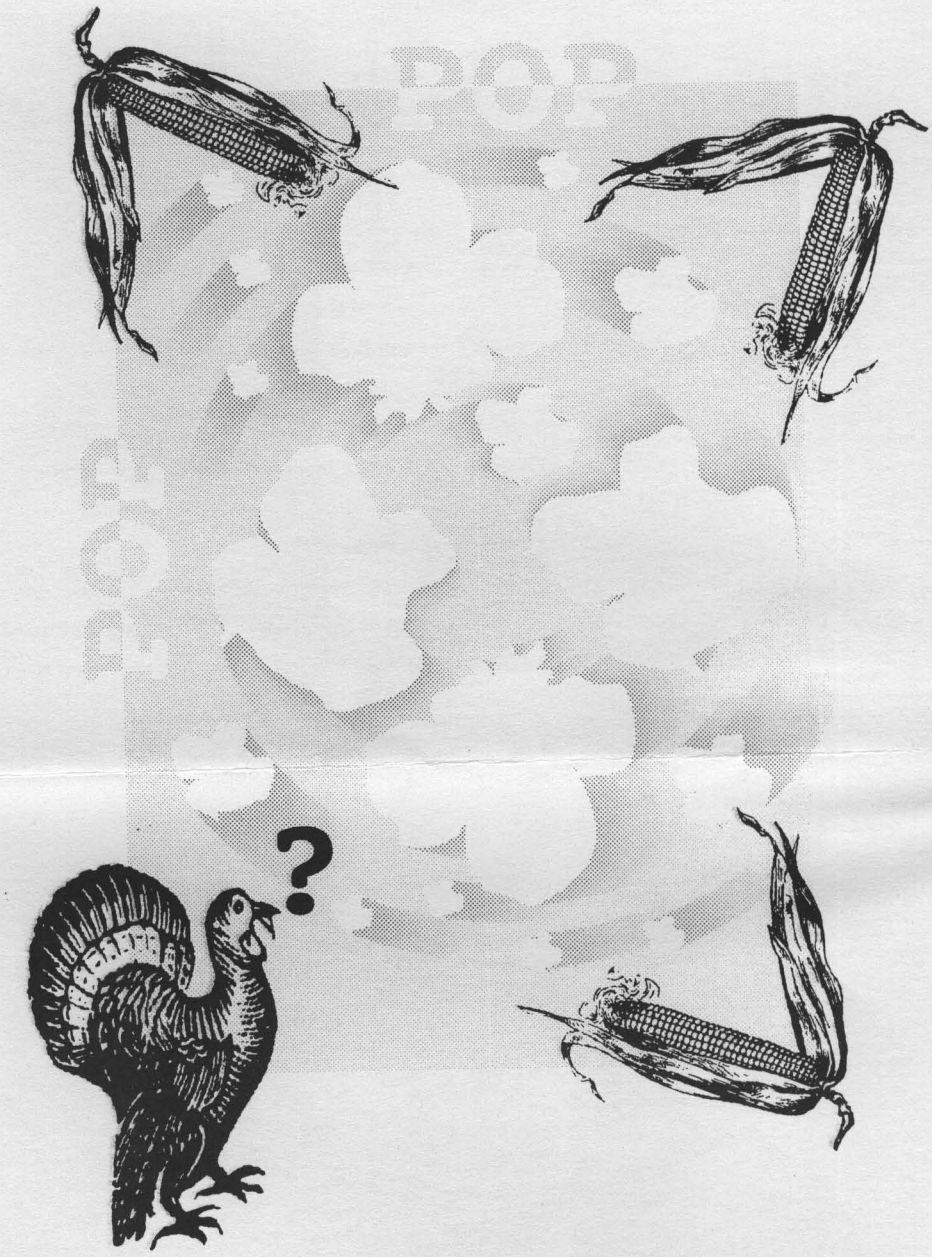
A True History of True Popcorn



Most Americans learned in elementary school about the Pilgrims' first Thanksgiving dinner in 1621. I can still remember the savory details of this feast described by my fourth grade teacher. Colonist and Indian alike feasted lavishly on roasted turkeys stuffed with dressing, fresh-made cranberry sauce, candied sweet potatoes, baked beans, corn on the cob coated with salt and dripping with butter, and pumpkin pies doused with ample quantities of whipped cream. After the meal was over, an Indian named Massiott brought popcorn, which was a big hit with the Pilgrims. Ever since, popcorn has been America's favorite snack food, or so we were told.

Unfortunately, primary evidence does not support this oft-repeated version of the first Thanksgiving. Only three foods were mentioned in primary accounts of this event: wild turkeys, venison and Indian corn. Presumably other foods were served, but not cranberries, sweet potatoes, beans, butter, whipped cream or pumpkin pies. The feast clearly did not include popcorn. No historical or archaeological evidence has surfaced indicating that popcorn, a variety of maize with a hard endosperm or outer shell, was cultivated anywhere in New England until the nineteenth century.

The Pilgrims, of course, did *parch* or heat other varieties of maize. Heating removes moisture from the kernel. Parching produced several advantages. Parched corn was less likely to spoil and it could be easily stored. It weighed less than the original corn and could therefore be packed into pouches, providing sustenance for long journeys. Finally, it was ground into meal, which could be used for a variety of culinary purposes, such as making bread.

Heating or parching corn causes the moisture inside the kernel to turn to steam. In most varieties of maize, the steam escapes without building up pressure. When the steam is prevented from escaping by the hard outer skin of popcorn, the kernel explodes. This explosion changes the molecular structure of the kernel and turns it inside out. Other varieties of maize have softer outer skins, making it less likely that steam pressure will build up inside the kernel. However, under certain conditions, other maize varieties, such as dent corn, will occasionally pop when heated. The resulting popped kernel is about half the size of true popcorn and is shaped differently.

Some Native Americans have popped corn since pre-Columbian times. Clay pots, presumably with lids on top, were used to pop the corn. Others put cobs into wicker baskets, which were placed near a fire. After

the popping ceased, the ashes were removed by shaking the basket. Popcorn could be easily ground down into meal.

Despite its presence among Native Americans, true popcorn does not appear to have been dispersed among mainstream Americans until the early nineteenth century. Seedsmen sold popcorn beginning in the mid-1820's. New York seedsman Grant Thorburn considered it "curious." Boston seed seller George Barrett considered it "curious and beautiful." John Jay Janney, a nineteenth century Virginia farmer, reported that popcorn was first known in his neighborhood about 1825.

During the 1830's the popcorn consumption increased, mainly due to the invention of the wire popper. The first known wire corn popper was reportedly made in 1837 by Francis P. Knowlton, who purchased wire netting from a hardware vendor named Amos Kelley in Hopkinton, New Hampshire. Knowlton shaped the wire into a box and added a long handle. Knowlton was unable to sell his invention, but Kelley and his son were successful. These wire poppers were also copied by other craftsmen. Within a few decades every household in New England reportedly possessed one.

The first known reference to popcorn in a cookbook was published in Russell Trall's *New Hydropathic Cook-book* (1854). Trall reported that popcorn was sold in fruit stands everywhere. He was not impressed with the commercial product, which he referred to as "dyspepsia corn," because it was heavily seasoned with salt and was very greasy due to the fact that it was popped in lard.

In 1861 New York cookbook author E. F. Haskell published the first known popcorn recipes in her *Housekeeper's Encyclopedia.* Her recipe for "Pop Corn Balls" was simple: "Boil honey, maple or other sugar to the great thread; pop corn and stick the corn together in balls with the candy." Her recipe for "Pop Corn Cakes" produced a kind of popcorn macaroon. She prepared them with eggs and sugar and baked them with presumably crushed popcorn. The resulting balls were not larger than plums. The second cookbook with a popcorn recipe was *Mrs. Goodfellow's Cookery As It Should Be* (1865). This recipe also recommended frying the kernels in lard. When popped, orange or lemon juice flavorings were added.

By the 1870's many cookbooks included popcorn recipes. For instance, recipes for "Popcorn Pudding" (ground-up popcorn in cream) and "Corn Candy" (popcorn with molasses and sugar) proliferated. Popcorn was also sold on the streets. It received a major boost at the Philadelphia Centennial Fair in 1876 when it was served by vendors. Crowds lined up to acquire a bag for a nickel. Sales were further stimulated by the Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893. Among those selling popcorn were Frederick William and Louis Rueckheim, who also sold roasted nuts. They experimented with combining nuts along with popcorn and molasses. Their result was Cracker Jack, which was first patented in 1896. Cracker Jack was the first commercial popcorn product, but many others soon followed.

Popcorn's popularity soared in a relatively short time. Beginning in the 1850's popcorn was increasingly available. In 1864 seedsman Fearing Burr reported that in many parts of New England popcorn was "somewhat extensively cultivated for commercial purposes." It was inexpensive and could be made by almost anyone. By 1900 popcorn had become one of America's most popular snack foods. Americans popped corn in their homes and at picnics. It was sold regularly at fairs, election rallies, circuses, sporting events and other large gatherings. Popcorn balls were sold at Coney Island; popcorn candy bars and rolls were sold by grocers. Popcorn increasingly appeared in recipes in cookery magazines and in cookbooks. It was regularly used at breakfast, served in milk or cream, before the creation of cold cereals. Popcorn was also included as an ingredient in recipes for confections, soups, salads, stuffing for fowl, meat loaves, and desserts. Popcorn parties became a form of entertainment after the turn of the century.

One surprising exception to the popcorn explosion at the turn of the century was in the fast growing movie theater business. When moving pictures came along, theater owners refused admission to popcorn. During the 1930's, this policy was reconsidered for financial reasons. Low-cost popcorn produced extremely high profits. As popcorn was usually seasoned with salt, popcorn consumption also increased beverage sales. Today, theater owners make more money from sales at concession stands than they do for admittance.

During the last twenty years the popcorn industry has changed dramatically, largely due to two major events. The first was the creation of new varieties of popcorn which expanded to thirty percent more volume than previously. The initial commercial product, "Gourmet Popcorn," was the brainchild of Orville Redenbacher. This was particularly important for those in concession stands who sold popped corn by volume. Fewer kernels of popcorn were needed to fill bags and boxes. The second was the application of the microwave oven to popping corn. The resulting marriage of Redenbacher's new varieties with the microwave doubled home consumption.

These changes may only be the tip of the kernel of popcorn's success. Previously popcorn has been almost exclusively an American snack, but recently popcorn sales to other countries in Europe and East Asia have expanded rapidly. If this expansion continues, America's snack food may well become the world's next fad food.

Andrew F. Smith

Andrew Smith is the author of *The Tomato in America: Early History of America's National Condiment.* He is currently writing books about the history of popcorn and the history of peanuts. He is scheduled to speak to CHAA on May 18, 1997.

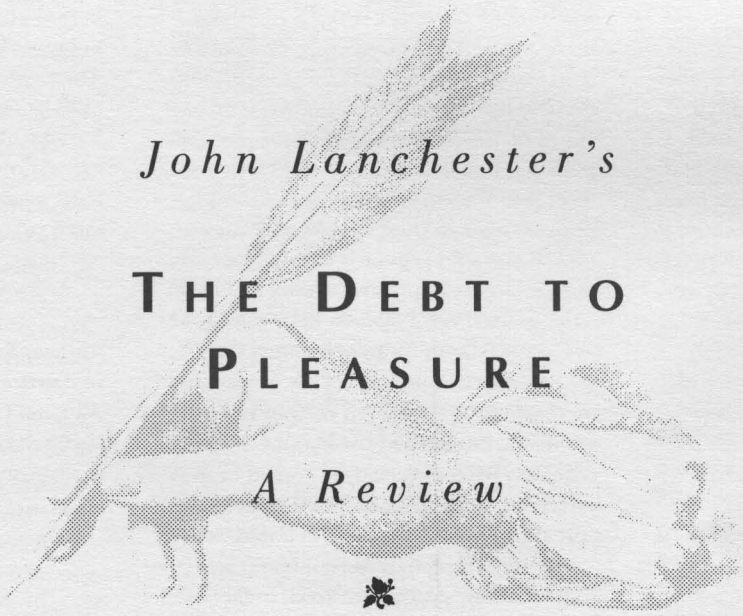
Tarquin Winot, the first-person narrator of this book, is beginning-to-end perverse. He writes his foreword before he has written the book; he blindly fails to understand his whole life; he gives more weight to dislikes as an indication of character than to likes; he says that "an artist should be assessed by what he doesn't do." He is opinionated, talkative, learned, and always blitheringly droll. He is the creation, one would almost say, because he is so concretely present, of himself, but actually of an English editor and writer, and as a literary character he will endure.

The writing in this book has all the qualities we prize as British: wit, erudition, cosmopolitanism, the "manner" of utter civilization and playful intent to amuse. It is both a novel (that claims to be a cookbook) and a protracted essay. There is much here for the culinary historian, disquisitions on: martinis, fish stew, "the happy family of pancakes," the history of the peach, French cooking, the English and spices, types of stews in international cooking. The reader launches into a sentence and becomes adrift, encountering a dash, a semicolon, a parenthesis, another dash, close parenthesis, period. Period? Already? At last? The use of language is fresh and highly virtuosic. "Father" refers to the ingredients in fish stew as "little finny blighters." A description of a girl: "Her eyes were hazel (everybody's eyes are hazel), but with green radial tiger-stripe highlights." That sentence begins simply, rises to a higher level with the aside, and ends in pure magic.

On cooking, when he gets around to it, he is both knowledgeable and inspired. The combination of lamb and apricots, so often used in "those masterpieces of the Persian kitchen," is "a taste that exists in the mind of God." "[T]he Inca's basic unit of time was predicated on how long it took to cook a potato," which indicates the importance of the potato in that culture. There are actual recipes, related more than prescribed, simple and judicious.

Mr. Tarquin Winot is a wordy fop ("Time for a drinky-poo"), a sneak, a criminal, a nervy, mean, wildly inventive, opinionated, exotically learned, conceited, arch man, given at times to extravagant language: "celeriac is tragically underrated"; "an excitingly semi-readable book about salads"; "a pinot noir with a welcome touch of backbone and a strawberryish attack." His character emerges wholly through his emotionally charged observations and florid opinions, and the story— for there is one— is only gradually understood. This book is not a quick read but a very rewarding and entertaining one.

A.W.



John Lanchester's

THE DEBT TO PLEASURE

A Review

Films

Lectures

Exhibitions

Food In Global History
University of Michigan Theme Semester
From time to time, the U-M offers interdisciplinary programs on one theme and this year there will be lectures, exhibits, a conference, movies and classes for students on food. Jan Longone's collection of cookbooks was one feature of the semester. On the schedule for December are:

Lecture:
Dec. 3: Professor of Chemistry Daniel Longone on "Men and Their Wines: Madiera Wine Traditions in Early America."

Film
Showing at the Michigan Theater, Friday at 5 pm, free admission

Dec. 13: "Frenzy"

Exhibitions
The Clements Library, the Kelsey Museum, and the Museum of Art are currently holding timely exhibits.

For information, call Raymond Grew or James Schaefer, 764-6362 or send e-mail to cssh@umich.edu.

http://www.culinary.net
If you are inclined to "surfing" the Internet, you may be interested in browsing the above address. We are told it contains news, information, online forums and chat groups and much more. Sounds like it's worth a visit; please let us know what you think. It is best viewed using Netscape 2.0 or higher or Microsoft Internet Explorer. If you have "how-to" technical questions, call "The Internet Culinary CyberCity" and ask for Ken Glaser or Vince Vaughn, 800-800-5579.

Pure Ketchup: ***A History of America's National Condiment, by Andrew F. Smith***
Notice has been received of publication of this new book by Andy Smith (see his article on popcorn in this issue). It includes recipes and is published by the University of South Carolina Press, $24.95. Members will remember Andy's talk last fall on tomatoes and his irrepressible enthusiasm for his topic.

December 8— Annual Holiday Dinner Meeting Celebrating 200 Years of American Cookbooks:
Recipes from Amelia Simmons' *American Cookery,* 1796 and Fannie Farmer's *Boston Cooking School Cook Book,* 1896

January — To be announced

February 16 — The Art of French Patisserie in the 19th Century
Speaker: Gilles Renusson, President U.S. Pastry Alliance

March 11 — Dinner at **Chianti** on Main Street, Ann Arbor
Speaker: Jimmy Schmidt, Owner

April 27 — *Cooking Under Cover:* Where Did the Dutch Oven Come From Anyway?
Speakers: Linda and Fred Griffith, authors

May 18 — History of Snack Food
Speaker: Andrew Smith, author

Washtenaw County Extension Service Building, 4133 Washtenaw Avenue, Ann Arbor, Michigan
Time 7:00 - 9:00 pm (unless otherwise noted)

CHAA Newsletter
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Ann Arbor MI 48105

Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

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First Class