

ANN ARBOR

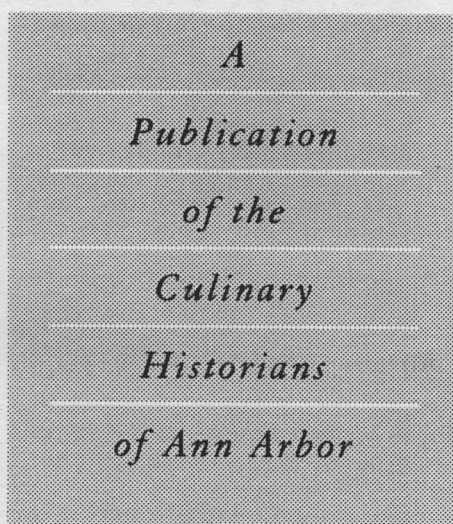
CULINARY HISTORIANS

MORE ABOUT OUR FOOD SOURCES

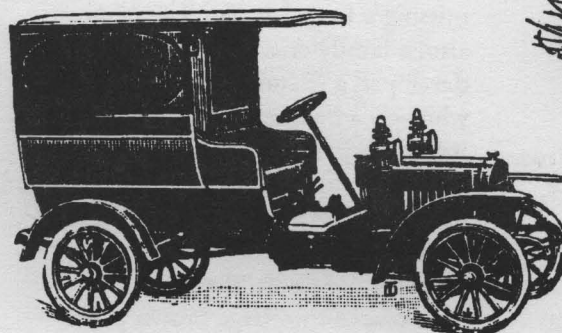


The concept of the family dinners on Fridays at my grandmother's house (of which I have written for these pages before) has been a curiosity to me, and somehow has also been important to my psyche. These essays are partly an effort to understand why I think about those evenings so much and why the subject comes up so often in family conversations.

After my grandparents Nathan (Ned) and Mali Gershenson made the trip from Poland to this country, they lived for a short time in New York City and then made a major move and tried apple farming near Romeo, Michigan. This proved a disaster and after two successive crop failures they were forced to move again, into Detroit, or more specifically Highland Park. By then the family was really poor! My



grandfather took to selling work gloves on the corner of Woodward and Manchester, outside the prosperous Ford Motor plant. His sons sold newspapers on three of those same corners. There were four sons but only three corners because one son, William, had to be free to fight off poachers who wanted this choice territory.



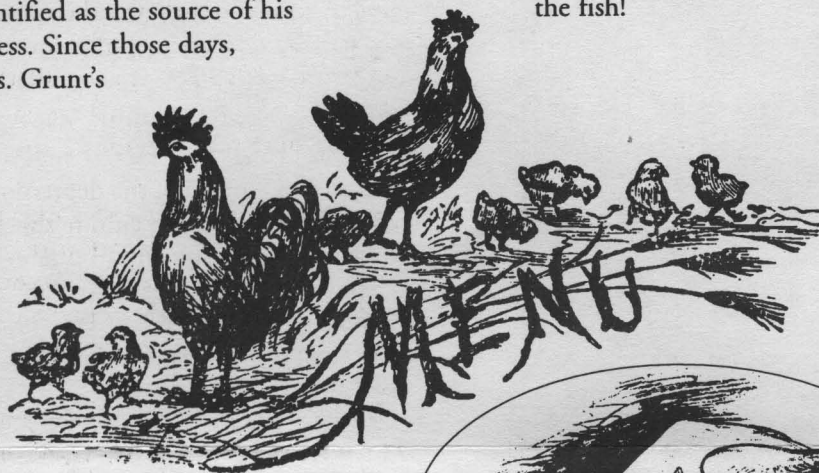
After some mild successes in real estate, my grandfather traded a piece of property for half of a small store on John R. Street. A gasoline pump was put near the curb and the store sold gas, services and supplies for automobiles. In 1924, my grandfather died suddenly of a ruptured appendix. The store was then run by the seven children, all minors, and my grandmother. Eventually they expanded to eight "motorist department stores" and became the Ned's Auto Supply Company. Early in the process, the Friday night dinners began.

The sources of food, over the years, for my grandmother's table represent a combination of traditional loyalties, a tracking of the development of the Jewish community within Detroit, and the advances in food distribution in America. Because driving and riding were forbidden on the Sabbath, small clusters of neighborhood stores developed in Detroit's inner city, where the Jews had first settled. For me, as a child, a trip to this Westminster area was a real adventure. Mrs. Grunt supplied over-the-counter cheeses, delicatessen, and



sundries. From the pickle barrels, pickles old and new were chosen individually, sometimes with tongs but more commonly by thrusting a hand and some arm into the opaque brine so a squeeze to determine

crispness could be administered before fishing out a suitably dilled cucumber. My last trip to Mrs. Grunt's preceded the extreme illness of a friend after a shopping and eating session there. By this time we had become aware of germs as a factor in contagion and the pickle barrel was identified as the source of his illness. Since those days, Mrs. Grunt's



children have become professionals. I wonder if any of her descendants are now into infectious disease medicine.

A story about my Uncle Chuck is that whenever he went to shop at Mrs. Grunt's she kept him waiting as she took care of everyone else in sight first. After this had been going on for some time, he finally gained nerve enough to ask why. She said, "Because I want everyone to know you shop here!" My uncle and his ego loved to repeat this tale.

Chickens were bought live and taken to the Schochet in the back of the store. He said a prayer, killed them by the traditional bleeding, plucked the feathers and wrapped them head, feet and all before your very eyes. My Aunt Rose, when she was a child, amused her mother once by saying, "I hope that Avrum (the shopkeeper) is a millionaire before I get married." She meant that she hoped he would have retired. She was apparently serving her mother notice

that she had no intention of submitting to exposure to that kind of cruelty after she had her own household.

Buying fish did not trouble my aunts, even though the fish were alive when purchased from a large water tank and died on the way home.

They did not even mind cleaning the fish!



Mercifully, the meat butchers did all their killing where we were not obliged to watch. These small shops were well lighted, carpeted with sawdust, and they all had very handsome, well-worn wooden chopping blocks. The absence now of these beautiful pieces of equipment is testimony to aseptic technique. I remember my father pointing out that most butchers were missing a finger or two. I remember, also, a family crisis when my father developed a friendship with a patient who was a butcher. My dad was trying to get grandmother, with her large family, to shift suppliers. There was no competitive bidding here, only loyalty, and she refused.

At all the stores, the purchases were placed into large brown paper bags, after the cost of all items was

totted up on the outside of the bag in pencil, and at home the contents and the addition were verified. An honest merchant who could add was rewarded with a steady customer. The original market at Dexter and Davison created a sensation by hiring a very pleasant, very black man named Leon who could speak Yiddish and Polish *and* who would add quickly and accurately. This store began simply as a greengrocery in an open-air tent, but before long we needed to specify if we were referring to the original Dexter and Davison Market or the one at Wyoming and Seven or at Coolidge and Ten Mile Road.

There was also a good deal of home delivery. My grandmother had a refrigerator on the back porch, so the egg man, the milk man, and the butcher—who also responded to the telephone—all had direct access to

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the household's needs. Of these, the egg man seems to have had the greatest longevity. He continued to calculate the family's needs by knowing who was at home, counting the eggs left, and adding the correct number directly into the refrigerator. He did this until after the Korean War. He lost a son during that action and afterwards sadly told the family he no longer had the heart for his work.

What Became of Mom and Pop— Not to Worry!

I have already noted that most of the original food markets in Detroit were single-purpose family operations, small store fronts clustered together. As part of my interest in the progress of food sources for our homes, I decided to trace some of these fami-

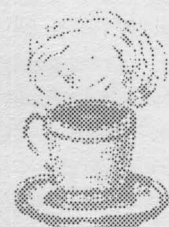
lies. Many of them— the Luries, Bormans, Grants, Cutlers, Frankels, Wolfs, Hillers, and Weisbergs continue to be substantial members of the community, although most of them are no longer in the food business. These independent markets disappeared into middle-sized chains like Wrigley's, Buy Lo, Great Scott, Big Bear and Chatam. These, in turn— and even the Dexter Davison markets— were gathered up by Abner Wolf's Allied Food. The Borman brothers developed the Farmer Jack Stores, but during the eighties they were taken over by the A & P supermarkets. This is now controlled by an even more huge German holding company. Wholesale purchasing and distribution are now largely managed by enormous co-ops such as Foodland, Super-Value Foods, I.G.A., and Spartan.

Actually, today only the Hillers are still in the supermarket food business, and they are perhaps the only Jewish family involved locally. They began as a single market in 1945 at Michigan and Central, then at Michigan and Cecil. Afterwards, they moved with the community to Ten Mile Road and Greenfield, Orchard Lake and Maple— ever larger and ever farther west. To visit one of today's supermarkets and reminisce about the old days and the old stores on Dexter and on Twelfth Streets during the depression can be an invitation to culture shock.

Incidentally, Leon still lives. He worked in the food business along with the Hillers for many years. Now he is eighty-four years old, retired, and he "still keeps in touch."

The author gives thanks and credit to Mr. James Hiller for facts included.

Ned Chalot is a retired physician and member of CHAA. He wrote about dinners at his grandmother's in the Summer 1996 issue of this newsletter (Vol. XII, no. 3)



CUISINE IN NORTHEAST BRAZIL



Getting on the Brazilian airplane in Miami to fly to Recife gave me a jolt. The overhead screen announced that we had 3,875 miles to traverse. Yes indeed, this was a long trip. Recife is a city at the point of the bulge in South America, as far east as Greenland. But family connections were pulling me there. My son, stationed abroad in the foreign service, married a Brazilian and I wanted to visit them, meet her family, and experience the tropics. And of course the cuisine.

They met me at the airport, took me home to their ninth floor apartment overlooking the beach, and in no time I was settled in enough to begin to evaluate the food. The bread was boring in Brazil but the rest of the cuisine was not. Every single morning Nelda the maid served the same rolls that one finds in every bakery—white, oblong, and hard-crust. Very acceptable in their way, but one longs for variety. The remainder of breakfast consisted of fruit, cheeses and sometimes scrambled eggs. The fruits, cantaloupe, pears, bananas, grapes and papayas were especially tasty. Coffee was always available at breakfast.

Lunch is the main meal of the day in Brazil. It is large and consists of several courses, including soup, a meat stew or a fish dish, rice or potatoes, perhaps some salad and dessert. Vegetables are served as part of stews but seldom as a side dish. One wonders how people go back to work after such a large meal; there is no siesta time in Recife.

Dinner was often similar to lunch, with fewer courses. Neither meal included bread. Seasonings for the excellent dishes Nelda

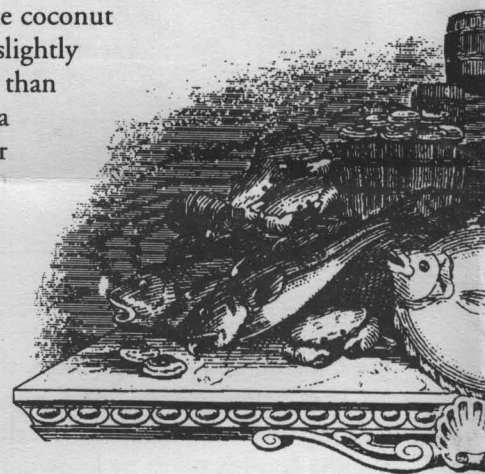
prepared always included lots of garlic and onions and cilantro. The fragrance from the kitchen was intriguing and a delight for the senses.

Restaurant fare always included lobster and shrimp on the menu. Recife is, after all, a sea-coast city. We enjoyed a type of fish stew, called *mocqueca*, served in a bubbling pot, family style. It was quite oily and very tasty. The fish is poached in a rich broth seasoned with onions, sweet peppers, coconut milk, lime juice, *malagueta* pepper, tomatoes, and oil. Marjoram and parsley help season it. Rice is served as a base for the stew. Another fish stew we ordered was made with *dende* oil, the oil from the coconut palm. It has a slightly stronger flavor than other oils and a lovely red color which is imparted to the food. A common condiment is *farofa*, ground and toasted manioc flour, which is sprinkled on the food.

My son referred to it as the local sawdust, and indeed I found it tasteless.

A specialty of the region is a complete meal served in a partially hollowed-out small pumpkin. Fish or shrimp are mixed with a sauce containing cream cheese and fruit. The pumpkin is more like our squash in texture and is less fibrous. You dig out some of the pumpkin with the fish mixture and put it over rice.

If you want water in a restaurant you need to order "*agua mineral*." It is not served automatically. It is not uncommon that the restaurant will bring, without your bidding, a small appetizer (usually filled dough items like empanadas) and these will be added to your bill. Coffee however, is by request and is



included in the price of the meal. The cups are very small, similar to demi-tasse cups, and it is very strong and delicious. Maybe it is unpatriotic for Brazilians to order "decafe" because I never saw it done. Soft drinks are very prevalent, with signs for CocaCola everywhere.

There are no lemons in Brazil. What they call *limon* is really a lime that looks like the ones we get here. The juice is used in many recipes and slices are served with many foods. The juice will leave a stain on your mouth and hands if you are exposed to the sun.

The long sandy beach at Recife attracts many local people and tourists. All ages and all shades of brown skin color can be seen. I

never saw an obese person nor anyone with white hair.

The bathing suits on young females are called "dental floss" because of their revealing nature. Body image is terribly important in Brazil, but

there seems to be a fascination with the buttocks (called

boom boom) rather than

breasts as we may find here. There are even shops labeled "Boom Boom" selling bathing suits.

Food stands are common on the beach and a favorite drink is coconut milk drunk directly through a straw in an open coconut—refreshing in a land that has a year-round temperature of eighty-five to ninety degrees.

The local supermarket brought a few surprises. The fenced compound, which includes other stores, must be entered through a guarded gate where you receive a free ticket for parking. It is at the edge of a *flavela* (slum). The grocery section is quite modern but a few differences could be noted. There is a long open display table

where many kinds of fish are laid out on ice. This is a very pretty sight. The fruit section is much larger than you find in an American store, with many fruits I did not recognize.

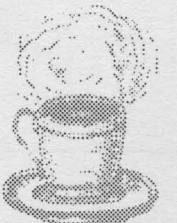
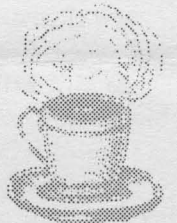
A visit to an open air market in Gravata, a city about forty-five minutes away, was a different experience. It was the end of the day and the streets were littered with parts of vegetables and other refuse. The market included much more than food: toilet items, shoes, clothing, tablecloths, et cetera. There were meat merchants with a local type of dried pork that requires no refrigeration. There were spice merchants with big tubs of spices, mostly cumin, thyme and a red powder similar to paprika. A truck with a loudspeaker bathed the marketplace with very loud music or political announcements.

At the American School, where many local wealthy children attend, we saw a parade of drivers and maids delivering a hot noon-day meal to the children. Even though there is a cafeteria, most apparently get served from home. Children are not given milk at the school lunch but there is a coke and soft drink machine around the corner from the lunch area that many patronize.

Brazilians love sweet desserts and cakes were common. They did not have the usual butter cream frosting we see in bakeries here, but rather were more likely to have a fruit glaze. And yes, there were coffee shops where the locals enjoy a respite with coffee and a snack.

Flying home late at night, I experienced an example of Brazilian food hospitality. The flight departed at eleven-thirty but I was awakened by the attendant at one a.m. and again at five a.m. offering a full meal. I refused the first offering but did accept the breakfast. When we landed in Miami about six-thirty, I was happy to be "home" where the temptation to overeat was diminished.

Marion Holt is a member of CHAA and has a degree in Foods and Nutrition



FROM THE PAST



How one wishes one had a lifetime or two to investigate and explore material found in old cookbooks. The full page ad below, which appeared in *The Universal Cookbook*, published in 1891 by The ladies' Aid Society of The First Universalist Church of Englewood, Chicago, cries out for further study. Who was Miss Amanda T. Jones who invented this "new" canning process? Who were these women who raised a million dollars to underwrite a completely women's-owned food company? How successful was it? What happened to the women? To the Company? Wouldn't someone like to investigate this

THE
UNIVERSAL COOK BOOK

PUBLISHED BY

THE LADIES' AID SOCIETY

. . . OF . . .

THE FIRST UNIVERSALIST CHURCH,

. . . OF . . .

ENGLEWOOD,

CHICAGO:

STEWART AVENUE AND SIXTY-FIFTH STREET.

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COOK BOOK.

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ONE WOMAN'S IDEA.



Inventors have long sought a suitable method of canning fruit and other foods *without cooking or the use of chemicals*. Hundreds of dollars and years of patient labor have been expended, but it has been reserved for a woman—Miss Amanda T. Jones, of Chicago—to be the inventor of this hitherto undiscovered process. The practicability of the process being established, a company has been incorporated with \$1,000,000 capitalization under the name of

THE WOMAN'S CANNING & PRESERVING CO.

Manufacturing was begun in January of this year. The first product—lunch tongues—(for the process is applicable to cooked foods as well), has produced the verdict from wholesale dealers, that with such improvements the whole canning industry will be revolutionized. Three factories, besides the one now in operation, will be established before autumn.

The new process consists of *placing the cans in a hollow chest from which the air has been expelled by hot steam and that in turn condensed by spraying cold water without*. This produces a *vacuum* and the cans are then sealed by delicate machinery. As every particle of gas is thus expelled from the canned goods, *decomposition is impossible*. *The process further is so simple that its cost is relatively less than the ordinary methods.*

The following are officers and prominent stockholders:

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Call on or address,

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G. L. Wilson, Agt.

Jan Longone is mentioned as a resource person in a front page article of the Wall Street Journal for Wednesday, April 9. The piece is called "No Squirrel Tonight: The Reasons Reveal Much About the Times" and is written by Cynthia Crossen. It discusses changes in the American diet, as evidenced in our cookbooks, and describes old recipes that include game we seldom cook now. A telling question: "Whose kids would eat it?" This article is of interest to all culinary historians and is worth looking up.

Raquel ("Ricky") Agranoff announces publication of her second book, "Risottos, Paellas and Other Rice Specialties" which has been published by Bristol Publishing's Nitty Gritty Press. She was also a visiting chef at the Hilton Head School of Cooking in March.

Ricky has been a CCP (Certified Culinary Professional) in the International Association of Culinary Professionals for the past eight years. She has been asked to form a local chapter of Les Dames D'Escoffier, if any qualified women are interested. This is a society of professional women involved in food, wine, other beverages and the art of the table. The purpose of this organization is to promote, among the members, understanding and appreciation and knowledge of their arts and those of other fields as they relate to these disciplines. If anyone is interested, give her a call at 313-971-7364, or E-mail her at mmerice@aol.com.

The Asian Foodbookery: A Quarterly Exploration of Asian Foods & Foodways Everywhere — As our members know, CHAA exchanges its newsletter with a number of other people and institutions. Among our recent exchanges is a fine new quarterly newsletter, *The Asian Foodbookery*. R.W. Lucky, the editor, writes well and is most knowledgeable about new Asian cookbooks and lots of hard-to-find news and tidbits about Asian cuisine.

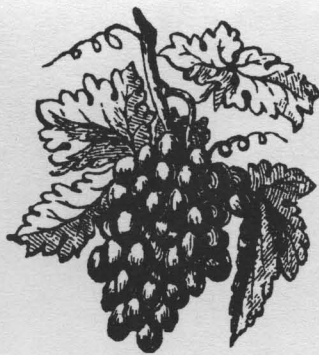
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One book reviewed in the sample copy sent is *The Food of Paradise* by Rachel Laudan, who was our speaker in October.



The American Institute of Wine and Food will hold a conference in Miami, Florida, October 30-November 2, 1997. It is called Summit In the Sun and emphasis will be on food of the new world and cuisines of the Americas. For information, call 415-255-3000.

Your editor, **Ann Woodward**, was reluctant to publish notice of the appearance of her first novel, but Jan has issued an order. Called *The Exile Way*, it is a mystery set in early eleventh century Japan, and has nothing whatever to do with food. Nevertheless, said editor feels confident that members of such a really special group as this will have wide enough interests to find it fascinating. It is published by Avon Books and is available at most large bookstores.

Last Fall, CHAA was privileged to hear **Rachel Laudan** speak on the Food of Paradise: Exploring Hawaii's Culinary Heritage. It should come as no surprise that her book has been receiving all kinds of fine international attention, including laudatory reviews in several food newsletters. It was recently awarded the prestigious Jane Grigson Award for Distinguished Scholarship at the Julia Child Awards Ceremony of the I.A.C.P. (International Association of Culinary Professionals).

The Boston Cooking-School Cookbook, by **Fannie Farmer** A facsimile of the first edition (1896) of the American classic, *Fannie Farmer's The Boston Cooking-School Cook Book*, has just been published by Dover Press. It joins others in the Dover series of facsimiles of classic American cookbooks, with new introductions by **Jan Longone**. \$12.95

September 21, 5 pm — Wild Mushrooms of Southeast Michigan
Speaker: Jim Blaszczyk

October 19 — History of Confections in the Americas
Speaker: Sharon Burdick

November, date to be announced — Tour of BREWBAKERS, Kerrytown, Ann Arbor

December 7 Annual Participatory Dinner

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



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Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

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