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Repast

Quarterly Newsletter of the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF TASTE IN EIGHTEENTH- CENTURY FRANCE



CONSTRUCTING THE COOK

by Sean Patrick Earl Takats

This is the prepared text, slightly edited, of a presentation by Sean Takats, a Ph.D. student in early-modern French history at the University of Michigan. He delivered the talk at the Workshop on Experts and Expertise in Pre- and Early-Modern Societies, held at UM's International Institute on October 6-7, 2001. Sean wishes to thank the Lilly Library at Indiana University, whose Everett Helm Visiting Fellowship facilitated his access to its Dr. and Mrs. John T. Gernon collection of culinary literature for this research.

In 1739, François Marin's cookbook, *Les Dons de Comus* ("The Gifts of Comus"), announced a revolution in the world of fine dining: the creation of *cuisine moderne*, also known as *nouvelle cuisine*. This new style of cooking promised radical change from the "old" style of cooking, *cuisine ancienne*: "Cuisine ancienne was terribly complicated and extraordinarily detailed. Cuisine moderne is a form of chemistry."²

In Marin's opposition of chemistry and complexity, we see the announcement not just of a quantitative decline in the complexity of cooking but also a dramatic qualitative change in the activity of the cook. Despite the boldness of his statement, however, this writer was not the first or last to proclaim such a revolution. Significantly, a number of cooks during the 1730s, '40s, and '50s claimed to herald a new age of cooking. Here, I seek to understand how such competing claims were anything but contradictory within the framework of *nouvelle cuisine*. Cuisine moderne, founded upon the principle of novelty, instead precluded the development of any strict order of taste.

Paris and the Rise of *Gastronomie*

The task of promoting cuisine moderne involved a two-part strategy, which my discussion will largely follow in form. First, in order to declare a revolution, cookbooks had to identify an existing order. Cookbook authors such as François Marin inscribed this order in the historicization of French cuisine. By placing cooking within the context of the "ancient" and the "modern," cookbooks established a framework for the promotion of cuisine moderne. With the existing order identified, cookbook authors took up the second part of their strategy, in which each promoted his own particular novelty. Each author formulated this novelty not only at the expense of the rigid past, but also in light of the perceived shortcomings of his contemporaries.

In this way, cuisine moderne established a number of competing strategies for the definition of taste. Some authors promoted cuisine moderne's ease of preparation, others its closer relation to nature's order, and a few its potential for economy. But among the various advantages touted by cookbook authors, none was more popular than the claim that cuisine moderne was more healthful to its consumers. In asserting the physiological effects of cuisine moderne, 18th-Century cookbooks explicitly sought to reposition the cook as the worthy colleague of the doctor. And although other strategies of culinary novelty would prove dangerous to cultural order, ultimately it was the renewed competition between cooks and doctors that observers would find most disturbing.

Below, I explore the discourse of taste through the lens of 18th-Century French cookbooks. Examining some of the same sources, Rebecca Spang has recently described this literature as revolving around "the familiar chestnuts of the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns" which, by the time they reached the level of cookbooks, had become largely devoid of meaning, "a topos, a commonplace."³ In his comparative study of early modern English and French cuisine, Stephen Mennell has placed culinary literature within Norbert Elias's model of the court society. He characterizes innovation of bourgeois cuisine, for example,

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as little more than "simplifications from courtly models," and situates cuisine moderne largely within the context of a rigid hierarchy of taste.⁴ On the contrary, I will argue that the discourse of cuisine moderne represents far more than a simplification or topos, but an innovative attempt to recast the role of the cook. Cuisine moderne embodied a deliberate effort to create a new type of culinary expertise, with wide-reaching social ramifications.

Constructing the Ancienne Cuisine

François Marin's cookbook began with a definition of the inadequate past upon which cuisine moderne dramatically improved. The historicization of cuisine moderne in this case took the form of homage to the ancient Romans and Greeks, followed by the more immediate debt owed by the French to their Italian neighbors. In Marin's account, the Greeks received credit for teaching the Romans the secrets of fine dining. "The Romans, civilized by the Greeks, took from them all their tastes; the fashionable cooks in Rome were usually from that nation, and these conquerors, enriched with the spoils of the whole world, joined magnificence and profusion to delicacy."⁵ Just as the Romans had learned to eat well from their Greek cooks, so had the French learned from the Italian cooks whom Catherine de Medici had brought with her to France. This claim was never presented as a startling revelation, but rather as common knowledge: "The Italians polished all of Europe, and they are the ones, without question, who taught us how to prepare food."⁶ The key element of the analogy between French and Romans was that in both cases, the inheritor of this culinary knowledge had dramatically im-

proved upon the original. The Romans effected their improvement chiefly through the application of sheer wealth: "The inventive genius of the Greeks made Roman opulence shine."⁷

To be sure, tales of Roman culinary extravagance were not new. In 1691, Massialot had described "the luxury of these princes of Antiquity, who, not content to have brought to their tables, with immense cost, all that was most rare in the other parts of the world, also demonstrated their magnificence by having served a beverage of pearls of an infinite price."⁸ In contrast to this embarrassing display of *wealth*, 18th-Century cookbooks moderne stressed the role of French *ingenuity* in the perfection of cooking. Unlike the Romans, the French had perfected upon the Italian mode of cooking through the application of skill, the "genius" by which cuisine "has become as increasingly delicate as it has become increasingly polite."⁹ This attention to detail extended far beyond cuisine, and formed a national character trait, as another of Marin's cookbooks proclaimed: "It is said that the genius of the French is less suited to invent by themselves, than it is to perfect the inventions of others."¹⁰

In quite another sense, however, French cookbooks drew more than just an analogy between ancient and modern cuisines. Cuisine moderne was meant to represent far more than the simple *recapitulation* of Roman improvement through the application of genius rather than wealth. Instead, cookbook authors traced a story of continual perfection stretching from the ancient Greeks through to their own present day. The proof of this progress was simple enough to Marin: "...it is that we came after them, and that cuisine is an art, which practice and experiences renew each day according to our needs. It should perfect itself every day."¹¹

This historical process of gradual improvement had by the beginning of the 18th Century culminated in "cuisine ancienne." According to Marin, "Cuisine ancienne is what the French put into vogue throughout Europe, and what was generally followed less than twenty years ago."¹² Over a decade later, Briand would largely echo this statement: "Cuisine ancienne is what the French put into vogue in all of Europe at the end of the last century."¹³ But even though cuisine ancienne had run its course, cooks would erect cuisine moderne directly on top of the old. "Cuisine moderne, established on the foundation of the old, is performed with less equipment, effort, and does not cost as much. It is simpler, cleaner, more delicate, more educated, we say, and even more varied."¹⁴ But even though cuisine moderne rested upon the foundation of cuisine ancienne, it also diverged radically from its predecessor, as Marin made quite clear: "Today one makes the distinction between tradesmen and those who pride themselves on having a good table, between cuisine ancienne and cuisine moderne."¹⁵

This is not to say that cookbooks had never before declared a break with the past. Le Sieur Robert in 1674 dreamed of the day when his efforts to modernize cooking might be recognized, for then "... it will even be admitted that I was right to reform this antique and disgusting manner of preparing things, and of serving them such that their im-

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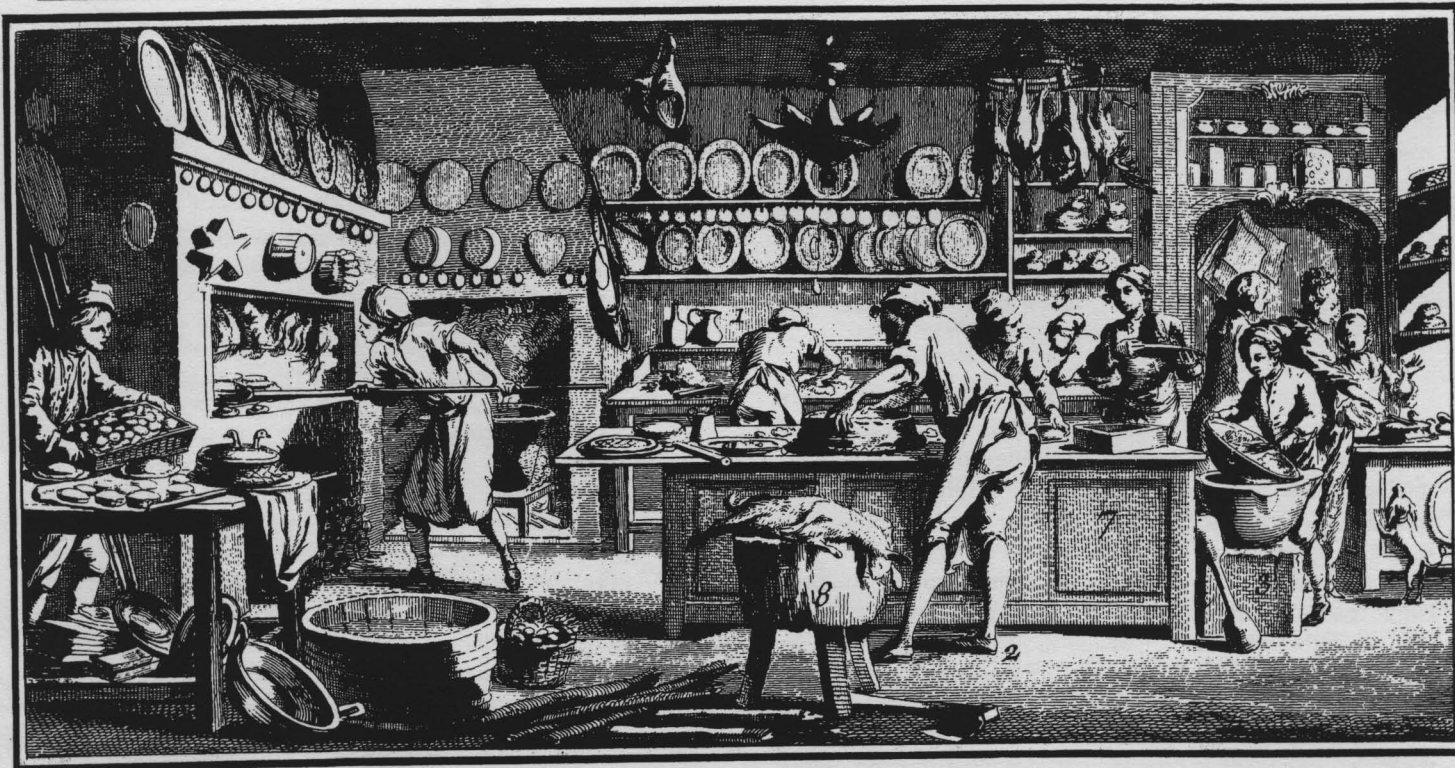
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The *pâtissier* (pastry-cook) in his kitchen, as depicted in a plate from the *Encyclopédie* (1751-1772). Notice the butcher's block in the foreground, and the carcasses hanging overhead.

propriety and rusticity only produce useless expenses without control, excessive profusion without order, and finally inconvenient superfluities, all without profit and without honor."¹⁶ But while Le Sieur Robert promised a new style of cooking, he imagined change based mainly on the improved sensibility of the cook, the intervention of delicacy in place of rusticity. These attributes would not suffice for cuisine moderne, which required the application of entirely new methods. The prolific author of cookbooks Menon perhaps best assessed this sea-change in the requisite skills of the cook: "It is generally agreed that manual dexterity, sound judgment, a delicate palate, and sure and fine taste are the absolutely necessary qualities of a good cook. I daresay these are no longer enough."¹⁷

From Occult Power to Scientific Method

Cookbook authors such as Marin claimed that the relationship between cook and doctor was natural: "[W]ho does not know that the cook is often called to the counsel of the doctor, and that cuisine ultimately serves medicine?"¹⁸ Menon recalled the Roman justification of this argument: "The science of cooking is the servant of medicine. *Coquina medicinae famulatrix est.*"¹⁹ This was not an attempt to supplant the authority of doctors, but rather to support it from below. Menon assured his readers that he would never seek to subvert the doctors' authority. "If cooks ever form a guild," he wrote, "in the name of my colleagues I believe I can assure that they will never dream of escaping their subordination with respect to doctors."²⁰ This ardent desire to ensure that the cook could effectively serve as the

"servant" or "counsel of the doctor" existed alongside the lamentation that this role had largely disappeared at the hands of doctors.

Cooks thus found themselves in a tricky position, for they wanted to restore themselves as doctors' worthy colleagues, yet they also blamed the medical profession for reducing cooks to their present state. "It is against the cook that [medicine] turns its artillery."²¹ One way of avoiding this problem was to cite doctors themselves. Briand claimed to include what "skilled doctors have written on the nature, the properties, and the selection of foods. What has been dispersed in multiple books is here found reassembled in a single point of view."²² Marin wondered whether cuisine moderne could repair the rift between the two professions: "Would it be impossible to reconcile the two? In effect, do the diversity, the quality and the knowledge of ingredients, or rather their abuse and excess, make them dangerous to us? In a word, is it necessary that the lives of fine diners be shorter than those of other men?"²³

Marin was not alone in expressing these concerns about the power of the cook over the body's health. In fact, no one appears to have doubted the power of the cook to effect dramatic changes in health. Menon admitted that "these new elixirs that refinement has introduced are very capable of making the blood fiery and acrid, and of upsetting the animal economy."²⁴ These "elixirs" included such cuisine moderne refinements as the ultra-refined bouillon known as "quintessence," its name recalling alchemy's mysterious fifth element. Even the most ordinary tasks could go awry.

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Seasoning, for example, could either perfect a dish or make it fatal: "Salt, pepper, and other spices are ingredients more precious than gold when they are used properly, but become true poisons when they are overused."²⁵ If a cook miscalculated, he would "substitute pure corrosives in one's food."²⁶ Concerns about the power of the cook were not limited to cookbooks. The author of the article on "Taste" in the *Encyclopédie* worried that in the hands of the cook, dishes might become "poisons, rather than foods useful and appropriate for the conservation of health."²⁷

Because of the powerful link already assumed between the cook's art and his master's health, the possibility of harnessing the cook's powers held huge potential. Cuisine moderne promised that the key to this effort was scientific method. Marin asked, "'What is the function of the cook?' Is it not to detach these juices from their natural viscosity or from the particles which surround them, through cooking, baths, and extracts, in order that they pass into the blood with less obstruction?"²⁸ Cuisine moderne delighted in the use of such scientific language. "The science of the cook today," writes Marin, "consists of the breaking down, making digestible, and quintessencing of meats, extracting the nourishing and light juices, and of mixing and combining them together so that nothing overpowers and all can be detected."²⁹ Menon repeats this last description almost word for word.³⁰

Proponents of cuisine moderne were not suggesting that every cook should run off to become his own kitchen scientist. Just as the idealized cook was meant to serve the doctor, so should the cook remain subordinate to the cookbook author. Cooks could rarely achieve proper results on their own, and even then only "after several attempts and great expense."³¹ But if cooks followed the advice of their cookbooks, the possibilities for perfection were endless. The author of one such book suggested that the cook could build a "harmonious instrument of flavors" that would produce symphonies of taste. To this end, the author mapped seven fundamental tastes to the seven basic musical notes. He imagined that a particularly well-trained cook could play the palate like a musical instrument, producing consonance instead of dissonance.³²

The Power of Cook over Master

These increasingly ambitious attempts to harness the cook's powers did not go unchallenged.

At first, one critic of cuisine moderne, styling himself the Pâtissier Anglois ("English Pastry-Cook"), appears to mirror culinary literature's own language: "They know the manner of refining each thing, so that nothing dominates, and so that nothing can be distinguished, either by taste or by the eye, whether what one eats is flesh or fish." It quickly becomes apparent, however, that he finds the new style of cooking to be a perversion of natural order: "The great art of nouvelle cuisine is to give fish the taste of meat, meat the taste of fish, and to leave vegetables with absolutely no taste."³³ In the eyes of the Pâtissier Anglois, the cook's work

was perverse, hopelessly distorting each food's natural flavor. The claims of scientific refinement, far from producing a more rational and healthful cuisine, instead resulted in chaos and disorder. His critique went still further. Ominously, cuisine moderne posed a danger far beyond the kitchen walls:

It is in the imitation of this delicate refinement that our clever authors also possess the art of disguising every genre. Plays of eloquence have the air of dissertations, and dissertations the air of plays of eloquence; prose is of the tone of verse, and verse is of the tone of prose. Funeral elegies make people laugh; comedies make them cry; an opera is a sonata; a poem a history; a history a novel.³⁴

Cuisine moderne thus threatened not only to confuse the palate, but also to turn the literary world upside down!

Like the Pâtissier Anglois, the Encyclopédistes also dreaded the cook's power over the body. Each new cookbook, they lamented, seemed only to add to the confusion of cuisine moderne, which

is in reality a study, a most painful science, on which we have seen appear without cessation new treatises under the names of the *Cuisinier François*, *Cuisinier royal*, *Cuisinier moderne*, *Dons de Comus*, *École des officiers de bouche*, and many others which perpetually change methods, and sufficiently prove that it is impossible to reduce to a fixed order what the caprice of men and the deregulation of their taste will research, invent, and imagine in order to conceal food.³⁵

In the eyes of its critics, cuisine moderne at best masked nature; at worst, it perverted natural order. In either case, it posed a threat both to the physiological health of its consumers and to the cultural health of its consuming society. Yet even though critics of cuisine moderne shouted its dangers, they never questioned the immense power implicitly ascribed to the cook. As a result, they never undermined the fundamental argument of cuisine moderne, which held that sufficient precision could ultimately prevent any ill effects on the consumer's health.

The dream that the cook could become the doctor's servant required cooks to join their skills of taste and judgment to the precision of scientific method. Yet by placing the cook in a position of increasing responsibility, cuisine moderne unleashed the threatening possibility of the servant inculcating taste in the master.

This potential cultural role-reversal represented cuisine moderne's greatest threat, and was shared by all of cuisine moderne's competing strategies, each of which promoted a particular form of novelty. Each required the "modern" cook to remain constantly informed of the expertise contained within cookbooks, which were themselves engaged in a continuing battle between codification and novelty. Each strategy, whether based on health, status, or economy, demanded that the cook assume responsibility for determining what constituted appropriate taste.

Thus, cuisine moderne demanded the formation of expert cooks, well-versed in the latest techniques. The formation of this expertise existed outside of the direct control of the master, and this potential for cooks to carve out an increasingly important liminal role as the determinants of taste was profoundly disturbing to some observers. These critics did not fear the possibility of cooks repositioning themselves with respect to doctors, but rather the attendant increase in the power of the cook over the master. ■

Endnotes

1. Comus, the ancient Greco-Roman god of festivity and revelry.
2. François Marin, *Les Dons de Comus* (Paris: Prault, fils, 1739), p. xx. All translations from the French are by Sean P. E. Takats.
3. Rebecca Spang, *The Invention of the Restaurant: Paris and Modern Gastronomic Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 46-47, 52.
4. Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), p. 83.
5. Marin, *Les Dons de Comus*, pp. vii-viii.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. xvii-xviii.
7. *Ibid.*, p. viii.
8. François Massialot, *Cuisinier royal et bourgeois* (Paris: Charles de Sercy, 1691), "Préface."
9. Marin, *Les Dons de Comus*, p. iii.
10. François Marin, *La Suite des Dons de Comus* (Paris: la veuve Pissot, 1742), p. xlv.
11. *Ibid.*, p. xlvii.
12. Marin, *Les Dons de Comus*, p. xix.
13. [Briand], *Dictionnaire des alimens, vins et liqueurs, leurs qualités, leurs effets, relativement aux différens âges, et aux différens tempéramens* (Paris: Gissey, 1750), p. xiii.
14. *Ibid.*, p. xiii.
15. Marin, *Les Dons de Comus*, p. xix.
16. Le Sieur Robert, *L'Art de bien traiter* (Paris: Jean du Puis, 1674), p. 1.
17. Menon, *Science du Maître d'Hôtel, Cuisinier* (Paris: Paulus-du-Mesnil, 1749), p. xxv.
18. Marin, *La Suite des Dons de Comus*, p. xvii.
19. Menon, *Science du Maître d'Hôtel, Cuisinier*, pp. xxvii-xxviii.
20. *Ibid.*, p. xxix.
21. Marin, *La Suite des Dons de Comus*, p. xvi.
22. [Briand], p. xiv.
23. Marin, *Les Dons de Comus*, pp. xxi-xxii.
24. Menon, *Cuisine et office de santé* (Paris: Le Clerc, 1758), p. 6.
25. Marin, *La Suite des Dons de Comus*, p. xxii.
26. *Ibid.*, p. xxii.
27. *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une société des gens de lettres* (Paris: 1751-1772), art. "Cuisine." The *Encyclopédie* was co-edited by Diderot and d'Alembert; articles related to cuisine are thought to have been written mainly by Chevalier de Jaucourt.
28. Marin, *La Suite des Dons de Comus*, p. xviii.
29. Marin, *Les Dons de Comus*, pp. xx-xxi.
30. Menon, *Nouveau traité de la Cuisine* (Paris: chez Joseph Saugrain, 1739-1742), pp. ii-iii.
31. Menon, *Science du Maître d'Hôtel, Cuisinier*, p. xxvi.
32. *Chimie du goût et de l'odorat ou principes pour composer facilement, et à peu de frais, les Liqueurs a boire, et les Eaux de senteurs* (Paris: P.G. Le Mercier, 1755), pp. xxiv-xxv.
33. "Lettre d'un Pâtissier Anglois au nouveau Cuisinier François," in *Le Cuisinier gascon* (Amsterdam: 1747), pp. 208-209. The author is thought by the modern publisher to be Louis Auguste de Bourbon.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
35. *Encyclopédie*, art. "Cuisine."

BRITISH vs. FRENCH COOKERY

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THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

The following thoughts, informal and intentionally provocative, were sent to the editor almost two years ago by Jimmy McWilliams, a subscriber and frequent contributor to Repast. Dr. McWilliams last wrote for the newsletter in Fall 2001, with a review of Marvin Woods' The New Low-Country Cooking.

Dear Editor,

I am presently working my way through Larry Zuckerman's book *The Potato: How the Humble Spud Rescued the Western World* (North Point, 1999), and I'm glad to see that you had mentioned the book in *Repast* ("Morsels and Tidbits," Winter 1999). It has its interpretive problems, and its obvious biases—the author has problems with the English because they were too snobby to accept the potato as willingly as did the Irish or French—but on balance it's a decent book, and it succeeds in making a strong case for the potato's essential place in world history.

Unwittingly, Zuckerman provides information to the beginnings of an answer as to why French and English cuisine evolved so differently. I have previously always read that this difference had something to do with court traditions, but, although Zuckerman does not make the case, he suggests that the answer to this huge question may have something to do with soup and land owning.

Specifically, the French peasants, impoverished as they were, owned their land. As land owners, their quest for self-sufficiency was high, a characteristic which led them to provide their own food rather than purchase it in markets. This made soup integral to the French diet, as it fed large families and improved over time (to a point, of course). Soup, versatile as it is, offers abundant opportunities for experimentation. Thus the French, in an ongoing quest to improve soup's taste, incorporated not just the potato for thickening, but all sorts of herbs, onions, cheese, and spices.

Moreover, because the peasants owned their land, their perception in the eyes of upper classes was not one of total degradation, but of rugged, if difficult, independence. This image allowed for the culinary inventions of the French peasantry to move from the ground up, through the higher ranks, and onto royal tables, as the upper classes had no hang-ups about eating "poor peoples' food." The English differed on every point. Their poor were disenfranchised, they traded day labor for food bought at market by their employers, and any culinary habits they forged were despised by the upper classes. Well, this is just a theory, but perhaps worth thinking about.

Hope you're well, and if there is anything that I could do to help *Repast*, don't hesitate to ask.

James E. McWilliams
Austin, TX
January 10, 2000

Coffee *à la Mode de Paris*

poem and drawings by Mark Howard

In sixteen-hundred seventy-two
An Armenian in Paree,
Sold steaming cups of blackish brew
For all the world to see.

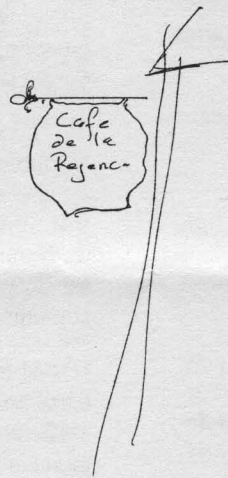
He set up shop and fired his urns
At the fair of Saint Germain,
Where eager clientele by turns
Came round and round again.



He pitched an oriental tent
(A most exotic show),
And Turkish waiters then were sent
A-moving to and fro.

A *petit noir* the drink was hailed,
Which is a charming phrase,
And 'little black' was thus regaled
Through endless nights and days.

With such success he went at once
To open up a shop,
And called it Café de la Régence
Where everyone might stop.



François Procope, from far away
Thought he would do the same,
And opened up a chic café
To which he gave his name.

It soon became a favorite haunt
And he had quite a job,
When *tout* Paree itself did flaunt
A coffee-drinking mob.

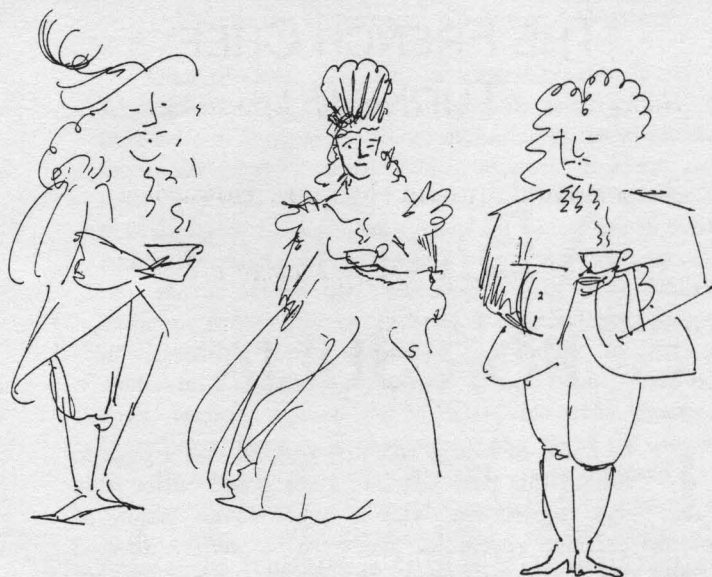
Who would have thought that gay Paree
Could seethe with such a craze,
But little do we know, you see,
Of life in ancient days.



These fashionable establishments
Are still around, you know,
So when in Paris, dames and gents,
You must be sure to go.

You'll find that you will nothing lack,
And with *beaucoup d'argent*,
You'll raise a cup of 'little black,'
Très bien, absolument!

Mark Howard is an instructor of classical piano at Bates College in Portland, ME, and a professional accompanist and performer. He is also an avid collector of rare old cookbooks, which he uses as the basis for his course "Adventures in Culinary History," offered through the University of Southern Maine's Center for Continuing Education.



Subligny's Ode to Coffee

by Adrien Thomas Perdou de Subligny



Good heavens, I've such a migraine
That I know not where to turn,
And I'm halted here in pain.
The surgeon bids my blood should drain,
But venesection I beg to spurn.
I'd rather take some coffee,
Which heals faster than a Hail Mary
While the rest can't cure in a year of days.
But has the word "coffee" missed your gaze?
'Tis a decoction Arabesque
Or, if you will, Turkesque,
Which in the Levant everyone imbibes.
'Tis availed in Asia and Africk,
From there it passed to the boot Italian,
To Holland and Great Britain,
Where they find that it does the trick.
And Armenians living in our city
Have brought it to France finally.
In benefit it has no parallel,
As the whole world now bethinks.
And most of all, a wife is granted a miracle
When 'tis her husband who coffee drinks.

Subligny (1639-1696), a Paris lawyer and playwright, was a younger colleague of Molière. His poem, translated here from the French by Randy Schwartz, appeared in the *Muse de la Cour* ("Courtroom Muse") of 2 December 1666, p. 225. As you can see, at this early date Parisians thought of coffee as a fabulous Oriental cure-all and (see the final lines) aphrodisiac.

"THE FRENCH CHEF" TURNS 90

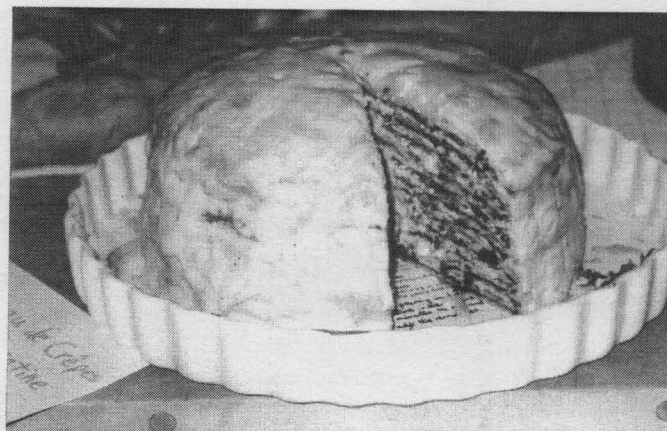


A BIRTHDAY FOR JULIA

The home of Midge and Bob Lusardi was a sight to behold this past July 21. Their grand buffet table was resplendent, with a large woven basket of colorful summer vegetables and fresh *baguettes*. Arrayed around this centerpiece were two dozen of our culinary creations, from a golden loaf of Norman beaten bread to slices of chilled, braised beef in aspic. Nearby, all available sideboard and counter space was filled with platters of appetizers and desserts of every description. The actual dining tables of our indoor picnic were each decorated with a brilliant white *toque* pierced with whisks, cut flowers and the tricolor flags of France and America. In the background, videotaped episodes of "The French Chef" ran nostalgically on a rec-room TV set, along with Dan Aykroyd's wicked parody from "Saturday Night Live." This was how the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor had chosen to mark the 90th birthday of Julia Child, who has remained not only one of our most beloved cooking celebrities but a deeply influential mentor and guiding light.

Our celebration, extensively reported in the *Detroit Free Press*, was one of dozens of similar events held across the country, culminating on the birthday itself (August 15) with a 200-guest black-tie dinner at COPIA (the Mondavi-sponsored American Center for Wine, Food and the Arts in Napa, CA) and Julia's appearance on "Larry King Live." Four days later, the National Museum of American History opened its exhibit "Bon Appétit! Julia Child's Kitchen at the Smithsonian," featuring biographical displays as well as the rebuilt kitchen from Julia's home in Cambridge, MA, where she filmed her original PBS-TV series and where she cooked for 40 years before her recent move to California. The exhibit, which received financial and curatorial assistance from the Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C. and its members, among others, continues through February 2004.

Success and the hoopla of celebrity have never spoiled Julia Child. At 90, she is still "down to earth" and blessed with the delightful modesty that has marked her entire life. Educated at prestigious Smith College, trained to cook at the renowned Cordon Bleu in Paris, she has always acted on the knowledge that gastronomy is but the highest parapet of a grand palace whose solid foundation is the home kitchen. The essence of her cooking sensibility was laid out for everyone to see in the dedicatory note of her first book: "To La Belle France, whose peasants, fishermen, housewives, and princes— not to mention her chefs— through generations of inventive and loving concentration have created one of the world's great arts."



Gâteau de crêpes à la florentine, from Julia Child's first cookbook, has layers of crêpes, mushrooms and spinach, and a "frosting" of cheese/béchamel sauce. Made by Richard McDonald— initially he learned it for use as a "babe magnet" ! (Photo: Randy Schwartz)

The Labor of Housewives and Great Chefs

Julia co-wrote that book, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (1961), with Louisette Bertholle and Simone Beck, the two fellow chefs with whom she'd founded a cooking school, L'École des Trois Gourmandes, in Paris ten years earlier. The goal of their book was to make French cuisine accessible to an English-speaking audience of home cooks. In their Foreword they wrote, "Cooking is not a particularly difficult art, and the more you cook and learn about cooking, the more sense it makes. But like any art it requires practice and experience. The most important ingredient you can bring to it is love of cooking for its own sake" (p.viii).

Pure love of cooking— of course— but how did the three women chefs turn that into such a broad knowledge of cooking? Julia shares a charming example with us in *Julia and Jacques Cooking at Home* (1999), which she wrote jointly with Jacques Pépin. In the 1950s, she recounts, the three women, with their husbands in tow, made a pilgrimage to a tiny restaurant in the sixth *arrondissement* called Chez La Mère Michel. They hoped to taste there an authentic *beurre blanc* sauce. A regional specialty of Nantes, this was not yet a classic sauce taught in cookbooks or cooking schools, although its fame was spreading with the rise of automobile travel. Before long, the three women were chatting with the elderly Mme. Michel, and they scored an invitation back to her kitchen— then and there— for a careful lesson in making the sauce! (pp. 238-41).

How easily nowadays we celebrate a woman nicknamed "The French Chef," hardly remembering that "chef" was once *male by definition*! Simply by daring to emphasize the home cook, Julia was going up against some very stubborn traditions. What she grasped was that even in the days of rank chauvinism, there was never a cast-iron wall separating the cookery of common housewives from that of élite chefs.

Consider "the leek and potato soup family" of recipes that she describes in *The Way to Cook* (1989). It is a family, but one where cottage matrons rub shoulders with flashy *restaurateurs*. Usually, she writes, these soups are made

with plain water (or slightly thickened with butter and flour) so that "the fine fresh taste of the vegetables is not obscured by lashings of chicken stock" (p. 13). The original soup, "the mother of the family in all her simplicity," is a hot *potage taillé* ("cut soup"), named for the diced vegetables. If some milk is added to the cut soup, the result is called *soupe bonne femme* ("good-woman soup"). As Pépin notes in their joint cookbook, if the cut soup is instead mashed, blended or puréed, it becomes *potage Parmentier*, named for the 18th-Century Parisian gentleman botanist whose recipes made potatoes palatable to hungry Frenchmen.

Judy Goldwasser made us the chilled, milkless version of *potage Parmentier* preferred by Julia, whereas Pépin, as a young man, learned to make a chilled, milky version from Lucien Diat, a fellow chef at the Plaza-Athénée restaurant in France. Diat, who came from a small town near Vichy, recalled that his mother used to prepare the dish using leftover *soupe bonne femme*. Diat's brother Louis, substituting half-and-half for the milk, had created *crème vichyssoise glacée* in America in 1917. At the time, Louis was master chef at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in New York, but he'd begun his career as *potager* at the original Ritz in Paris, and in naming this elegant soup *vichyssoise* he'd figuratively gone all the way back to "his mother's arms" and the rustic Vichy of his youth. Thus did a mere leftover find its way from provincial France to fine restaurants and world acclaim.

Simplicity, Generosity, a *Soupçon* of Mystery

One of Julia Child's innumerable contributions to American cookery has been her popularization of the French repertoire of composed salads, including the most famous of them, the Mediterranean *salade niçoise*. In *From Julia's Kitchen* (1975), she taught us that such salads are not to be tossed; the items must be dressed and seasoned in separate bowls, then attractively arranged together for serving. There, too, she reviewed the controversy over what makes an authentic *salade niçoise*. "I have always followed the recipe of Escoffier," she asserted, proceeding to list tuna, anchovies, tomatoes, potatoes, green beans, hard-boiled eggs, lettuce, *niçoise* olives, and vinaigrette among her ingredients. Here is a case where she opted for more, not less, for not even Escoffier himself— who'd grown up in a village outside Nice before arriving in Paris as a young cook in the 1860s— called for composing a *salade niçoise* with so many items. His recipe in *Le Guide Culinaire* (1903) lacked both tuna, eggs and lettuce, while in *Ma Cuisine* (1934), published the year before his death, he omitted potatoes, green beans, eggs, lettuce, and olives. But the delicious *salade niçoise* that Pat Cornett brought to our picnic made it easy to see why the more generous interpretation favored by Julia is becoming standard.

Like the *salade niçoise*, the *gratin* of eggplant, tomato and zucchini is of Provençal origin. Marcie Holtzman-Wax

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Abbreviations: Mastering 1 = *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* vol 1 (1961); Mastering 2 = *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* vol 2 (1970); TV show = Julia's televised cooking shows; French Chef = *The French Chef Cookbook* (1968); Company = *Julia Child & Company* (1978); More Company = *Julia Child & More Company* (1979); Way = *The Way to Cook* (1989); Way video = *The Way to Cook* video (1985); Master Chefs = *In Julia's Kitchen with Master Chefs* (1995); J&J = *Julia and Jacques Cooking at Home* (1999); Breads = Bernard Clayton, *The Breads of France* (1978); Willan = Ann Willan, *Look and Cook: Superb Salads* (1993)

dish	source	provided by
Leek and potato soup	J&J pp.52-3	Judy Goldwasser
Pain brié normande	Breads p.105	Phil and Barbara Zaret
Salade de tomates à l'huile	French Chef p.234	Fran Lyman
Watercress and cucumber salad	Company p.88	Mila Simmons
Layered gazpacho salad	More Company pp.159-60	Dan and Elayne Steinhardt
Salade niçoise	Way pp.365-6, J&J pp.109-13, Willan	Pat Cornett, Mel Annis, Helen Hodgson
Hot corn salad	Way p.376	Carroll and John Thomson
Gâteau de crêpes à la florentine	Mastering 1 pp.193-4	Richard McDonald and Linda Doros
Ratatouille	Way pp.317-8	Randy Schwartz and Colleen McGee
Gratin of eggplant, tomato and zucchini	J&J pp.200-203	Marcie Holtzman-Wax and David Wax
Potatoes Anna	TV show	Marion and Nick Holt
Tequila- and lime-cured gravlax with potato patties	Master Chefs p.267-8	Patricia Guerin
Poached salmon with sliced cucumbers and lemons	More Company pp.197, 200	Joann and Ned Chalot
Shrimp with green beans and sliced mushrooms	Company pp.40-1	Marjorie and Max Reade
Terrine verte of chicken livers	Mastering 2 p.324	Diana and Leon Warshay
Terrine de porc, veau, et jambon	Mastering 1 pp.566-8	Julie and Bob Lewis
Boeuf mode en gelée with carrots and pearl onions	Mastering 1 pp.556-7	Gwen and John Nystuen, Mavis Green
Chicken/pesto pipérade with seasoned fettuccini	Mastering 1 pp.137-8, Way pp.137-8	Sherry Sundling
Pêches cardinal	Mastering 1 p.630	Mary Lou Unterburger
Apple galette	J&J pp.414-9	Marcie Holtzman-Wax and David Wax
Strawberry-blueberry tart	Way video	Pat Cornett, Mel Annis, Helen Hodgson
Cream cheese and lemon flan	More Company pp.64-5	Toni Hopping
Cœur à la crème with strawberries and mint	recipe files	Jan Longone
Charlotte Malakoff aux framboises	Mastering 1 pp.605-7	Sherry Sundling
Genoa white almond cake	Way pp.469-70	Nancy Sannar
Queen of Sheba chocolate almond cake	Way pp.471-2	Nancy Sannar
Raw milk cheeses and a raisin bread	Zingerman's Deli	Jan Longone
Selection of white and red wines		Dan Longone
Fresh lemonade		Leslie Nystuen

CENTENNIAL OF THE HORN & HARDART AUTOMAT

OR

"THE HOUSE THAT NICKELS BUILT"

by Randy K. Schwartz

Think about the typical fast-food meal offered by McDonald's or other huge corporations today. It's popular all right, but most people would agree that its health and safety are a big concern. Eric Schlosser's muck-raking book *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (2001) dishes up, among other important information, the disgusting things that can be found in a typical burger or taco. Which makes it all the more surprising to learn that in the earliest days of the fast-food industry, success hinged on what was (at least for the time) an unprecedented level of cleanliness and quality. It was exactly by regimenting the preparation of food that concerns about its safety were allayed.

To see this, you have to look further back in time than Schlosser does. His exposé is devastating, but he gives readers the false impression that the fast-food industry was born in freeway-crossed southern California after WW2. Long before that era, the cleverly-named "White Castle" hamburgers—to name just one of today's big chains—was a thriving enterprise in several American cities. Founded in Wichita, Kansas in 1921, White Castle actually helped rescue the poor reputation of restaurant ground beef, a story recounted in David Gerard Hogan's *Selling 'em by the Sack: White Castle and the Creation of American Food* (1997).

Even earlier, the Horn & Hardart Baking Co. had set the industry pattern with a large big-city chain of fast-food eateries. By 1920, scores of its restaurants in Philadelphia and New York were appreciated as clean, affordable and fun places to eat. Their story had begun in Philadelphia in 1888, when investor Joseph B. Horn and lunchroom waiter Frank Hardart teamed up to open a 15-seat café opposite Wannamaker's department store on 13th Street. Business prospered, with Hardart manning the kitchen and Horn taking his turn waiting tables. Their coffee, the first fresh drip-brewed coffee sold on the East coast, became known as the best in town. Then, traveling around his native Germany in 1900, Hardart visited a Berlin *automat* restaurant, where customers took their helpings of food from an array of windowed, coin-operated compartments, while workers on the other side replaced items as they were removed.

The two partners paid \$30,000 to import the German vending gizmo to America, and in 1902 they opened the first Horn & Hardart Automat, at 818 Chestnut Street in Philadelphia. Cleanliness was a big part of its appeal. The city's Dept. of Public Health was waging the first effective battle in the U.S. against impure foods, sold by sidewalk vendors, milk suppliers, and other businesses. But at the Automat, a customer



photo: Berenice Abbott/ New York Public Library

could see each serving—from a salad or sandwich to a slice of coconut cream pie—before removing it from its cubicle of polished glass, porcelain and chrome. It seemed as if it had never been touched by human hands! The self-serve concept was a roaring success, and Horn & Hardart soon expanded to locations all over the city.

To flourish on such a scale, the company had to institute measures of food safety and freshness. First, day-old food wasn't sold at the Automats; it was carted away every evening to special discount shops in poor neighborhoods. At 5 o'clock every morning, a fleet of trucks was sent out to purchase fresh ingredients and haul them to central commissaries, where foods were prepared for the restaurants. Horn put together a corporate rule-book—every manager was given his own leather-bound copy—detailing how each item was to be prepared and plated, how often the tabletops were to be wiped clean, etc. As for that cup o' joe that customers served themselves from dolphin-head chrome spigots, a time card was filled out for each batch of coffee, and whatever brew remained after 20 minutes was discarded. The Sample Table was a system of daily executive tastings to check the quality of both the food and the coffee. Procedures similar to these, put to use by Horn & Hardart in Philadelphia, are often seen in the restaurant chains of today.

Not far from Philly, New York could lay claim to having invented the waiterless restaurant in 1885 with the Exchange Buffet (the word "cafeteria" wasn't coined until later), near the Stock Exchange. But even Wall Street hadn't dreamed up a *coin-operated* restaurant! The idea was a good fit for busy and fashionable Manhattan, and in 1912 Horn & Hardart opened an Automat at 1557 Broadway. The popularity of Automats soared further after steam tables were introduced in the 1920s, making possible a wide range of hot dishes. Many of the favorites were comfort foods: creamed spinach, mashed turnips, macaroni and cheese, baked beans, chicken potpie, Salisbury steak with mashed potatoes and gravy. Reportedly, in its 1950s heyday, Horn & Hardart owned over 100 Automats and cafeterias in greater Philadelphia and New York, dispensing a range of nearly 400 food and drink items to 800,000 customers daily, including 250,000 cups of coffee.

The Automats were furnished in Art Deco style, with ceramic-tile floors and circular, lacquered tables seating four diners each. There were counters lining the walls where especially busy customers could wolf down "perpendicular

meals," as they were called. In "Automat for the People" (*Gourmet* October 2002), Lorraine B. Diehl and Marianne Hardart, a granddaughter of Frank Hardart, put their finger on the populist atmosphere inside, noting that in the first half of the century, "We were a different country: formal in our manners and dress, but more relaxed about eating meals across from a stranger." A bit of social leveling occurred inside the Automat, where the proverbial "man in the street" might find himself sitting across from a banker, merchant, lawyer or actor. And unlike other restaurants or cafeterias, there were no waiters' checks or cash register displays to broadcast how much money different patrons had spent. Besides, coffee was only a nickel a cup, or two nickels starting in 1950. No one was chased out, even if they bought nothing. (Diehl and Hardart also have a book due out this November, *The Automat: The History, Recipes, and Allure of Horn & Hardart's Masterpiece*.)

Exactly what did the Automats automate? In terms of mechanical automation they were rudimentary, a precursor of today's vending machines. Much more important was their rationalization of technique, notably the labor of preparing, serving and testing food. Horn & Hardart was "America's first major fast-food chain," concludes Carolyn Hughes Crowley in her article "Meet Me at the Automat" (*Smithsonian* August 2001), for it was "the restaurant industry's first attempt at emulating the assembly line." At the commissaries, teams of four bakers assembled a pie every ten seconds, collaborating through precise timing at a revolving table: the first worker slapped a sheet of pastry in a pie tin held on a metal frame, the second spooned in the filling, the third covered it with an upper crust, and the fourth trimmed and labeled the pie for its trip through a carousel oven. At the Automats, the mind-numbing job of making change for customers was done by women called "nickel throwers" in glass booths, their rubber-thimble fingers moving at dazzling speed for hours on end. Other workers scrambled behind the coin-operated food compartments keeping them stocked. As much as the machines, it was the men and women of the Automat that were becoming automatons. Although leisurely by today's standards, the Horn & Hardart restaurants showed, in embryonic form, the industrial-style regimentation of labor and of consumption that would become notorious in the modern fast-food outlet.

In a final irony, that was exactly what drove the Automats out of business; they were beaten at their own game. In the 1960s, when Horn & Hardart was still trying to bake beans, for instance, in small, long-simmering batches with oven-browned strips of bacon, the more modern fast-food restaurants were pushing their efficiencies to unheard-of levels by using young, nonunion workers and cheap cooking methods based on post-war technologies and ersatz ingredients. One by one, the Automats were closed and their space leased out to rivals—Burger King, Pizza Hut, Roy Rogers. By 1978, all of them were gone except for one on E. 42nd Street in New York, which remained open until 1991. Today, Horn & Hardart survives only as a coffee merchandiser, while the Automat concept is literally a museum piece. A 35-foot-long segment of the original 1902 Automat from Philadelphia is on permanent display in the Palm Court of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington. This November, the Museum of the City of New York is installing an exhibit on the Automats, which will run through March 16, 2003. ■

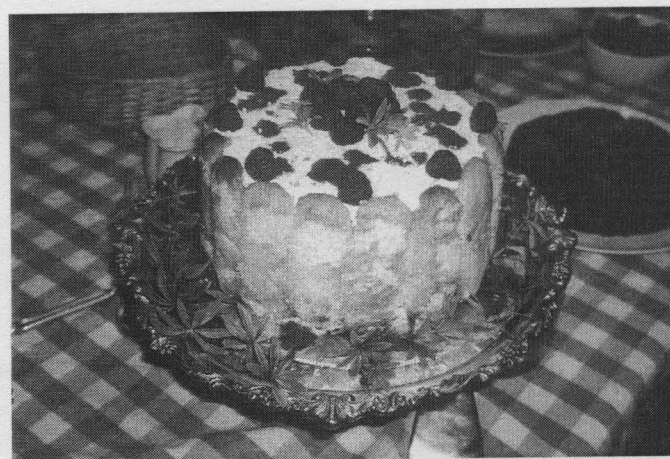
A BIRTHDAY FOR JULIA

continued from page 9

took Julia's advice by carefully arranging slices of the summer vegetables on a shallow oiled dish, where she topped them with herbs, breadcrumbs and cheese before baking. The term *gratin*, often misconstrued by Americans as meaning "grated cheese," simply means "crust." In fact, many French *gratin* dishes get their crusts from browning alone (without cheese or crumbs), such as the potatoes-and-milk *gratin dauphinois* of Grenoble. Julia calls her eggplant *gratin* "a simple version of *ratatouille*," since she prefers to make the latter in a covered casserole dish, first sautéing the different vegetables separately so they retain their individuality. Traditionally in Provence, *ratatouille* was prepared as a wet stew rather than the more dry, layered casserole seen internationally today.

Anyone who's seen Julia in action knows that part of her talent is her *élan*, her spunk. It was apparent well before she took up French cookery as a new adventure at age 38; in fact, during World War 2, she had worked in Ceylon and China for the Office of Strategic Services, predecessor of the Central Intelligence Agency. Fittingly, at least one of our picnic desserts also stands implicated in global espionage and intrigue. Sherry Sundling made us *charlotte Malakoff* using almond cream and fresh raspberries, which she layered in a deep glass bowl that was lined with ladyfingers soaked in orange liqueur. This dessert, which isn't cooked but is chilled and then turned from its mold, is a variation on *charlotte russe*. The latter, made with a type of Bavarian cream called *Moscovite*, was invented by the French chef Carême about 1815, when he was cooking behind enemy lines at the palace of Czar Aleksandr I in St. Petersburg.

Talleyrand, the French foreign minister, had cunningly sent Carême to ingratiate himself in diplomatic circles of the Austrian and Russian empires, which were allied against France to drive back Napoleon. With inventions like *boeuf Stroganoff* and *charlotte russe*, Carême was a sensation at the tables of foreign and security ministers in several capitals, and he gained access to privileged information that was relayed back to Versailles. The creamy, almost intoxicating *charlotte* became an emblem of fine dining in Paris and especially in Russia, where for many decades it was considered a pinnacle of the confectioner's craft. ■



Sherry Sundling presented her *charlotte Malakoff aux framboises* complete with a vocal imitation of Julia Child insisting on the use of homemade, not store-bought, ladyfingers. (Photo: Sherry Sundling)

CHAA CALENDAR

(Except where noted, programs are scheduled for 4-6pm at Ann Arbor Senior Center, 1320 Baldwin Ave.)

November 17, 2002

Jeffrey R. Parsons, Prof. of
Anthropology, Univ. of Michigan,
"Traditional Salt Making in Ancient and
Modern Mexico"

December 15, 2002

Holiday participatory theme dinner,
The Foods of Mexico,
at the home of John and Carroll Thomson,
4600 W. Liberty, Ann Arbor, MI
(further details forthcoming)

January 19, 2003

Roger A. Sutherland, beekeeper and
Emeritus Prof. of Biology,
Schoolcraft College,
"Maple Sugaring in Historical Times"

February 16, 2003

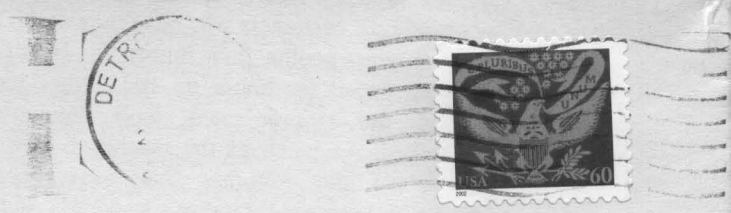
Clayton Lewis, Curator of Graphics Materials,
Clements Library, Univ. of Michigan,
"Culinary Images from the
Clements Graphics Collection,"
Clements Library, Main room, 3-5 pm.

Call for Volunteers

The Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor needs a tech-savvy
person or two to manage its Web site. For more details,
please contact Randy Schwartz or Carroll Thomson.

REPAST

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