

New York City 2001 Smithsonian Folklife Festival

By Annie Hauck-Lawson

HOW does one convey the flavor of New York life through food at an outdoor festival that attracts more than 1 million visitors for two weeks in the summer heat of Washington, D.C.? This was my challenge as foodways curator of the New York City program at the 2001 Smithsonian Folklife Festival and the subject of my CHNY program in January.

According to a Smithsonian official, the festival presents “diverse community-based traditions in an understandable and respectful way, to connect the public directly and compellingly with practitioners of cultural traditions ...in a rich cultural dialogue on the National Mall.” For the past 35 years, the festival has had specific themes; last June and July, New York City was featured for the first time.

Dr. Nancy Groce, a folklorist and the overall curator for the New York City program, in turn hired curators for subjects such as Wall Street, Broadway, transportation, music, fashion, and foodways. Smack dab between the Capitol and the Washington Monument sat a No. 7 subway car, an air-conditioned city bus, a Rosenwath water tower for visitors to walk



Cooks from Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan (by way of Shanghai) share their dumpling-making styles and lore at the Folklife Festival.

through, a staging of “Live at the Apollo,” daily stoopball and stickball games and much more. My arena was foodways. My work started in earnest when I traveled to Washington for the 2000 Folklife Festival. There I studied presentations, observing tradition-bearers talking and cooking, while interpreters fielded questions from the spectators.

At the onset of planning the New York City food program, many issues arose: the representation of our dynamic and diverse city, language, the stage, how to organize the program visually, our ability to convey New York’s food history,

budget, equipment, and facility.

And what about supplies? We can shop for everything in New York. Was the same true in the nation’s capital? Old-fashioned seltzer bottles, still delivered throughout our city, were virtually impossible to find in D.C.

But in all, we presented 80 themes about New York. One that seemed natural was dough: amid all the cultural diversity in New York City, flour and liquid mixed in myriad ways formed a cohesive thematic glue. Another was “A Slice of Contemporary New York Life Through Food.”

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Papers demonstrating serious culinary history research will be considered for inclusion in issues of the CHNY newsletters. Please contact Kathleen McElroy, newsletter co-editor, at (718) 459-0582 or mcelroy@nytimes.com.

Matriculating students of culinary history or related topics are invited to contribute.

Folklife Festival, *from page 1*

Fieldwork ensued, and food makers were contacted. Off to Coney Island for bialys and bagels; to Staten Island for hot dog rolls and sliced white bread as it has been made since the 1930s from a 125-year-old family bakery; to Brooklyn's Crown Heights for hand-rolled matzoh and roti.

All around Manhattan: to Midtown for handmade filo dough; to Harlem for painted cookies and spoonbread; to Chinatown for Shanghai stretch noodles and soup dumplings; and to the Lower East Side for street pizza from the hands of a man who kept his finger on the changing pulse of his community from the window of his pizzeria.

Presenters from other segments of the New York program contributed to the rich mix of the program. In "Neighborhood and Family Food Traditions," a history, life and food presentation, Bukharan court musicians from Queens made *plov*, a rice and lamb dish, in a pot carried from their homeland decades ago. A Manhattan bus driver cooked his mother's Monk's Rice (freshly cooked rice into which cheese and other ingredients are added), and emphasized that the recipe does not exist in a cookbook. In "Pierology 101: Pierogi in Comparative Perspective" five females from two different families, including a neon-sign maker and an 8-year-old girl, compared their recipes and lore of the little Polish dumpling as made and eaten in Brooklyn and Queens.

A Brooklyn musician cooked the red snapper and rice dish that he learned from his mother in Haiti. A folklorist of Guinean-Hungarian background prepared West African *kansiye* as she told

about learning this recipe from her father and traveling to many neighborhoods throughout the city. While she talked, she creatively adjusted her stew of chicken, cabbage, peanut butter and vegetables to accommodate available ingredients.

The program also included performance artists and conversations about New York food life by food writers and food educators.

Presentations that tapped into New York food history were reflected in the riveting stories that accompanied food preparation—sliced salmon and tales of a store owner's daughters elbow-deep in herring barrels, the necessity of New York water for pickle and bagel-making, the standards and nuances of the egg cream. Onlookers were entranced by Manhattan Shanghai chefs twirling long life noodles. The same chefs revealed the secret of soup dumplings in hands-on workshops. Bialys, known and loved in New York but a relative mystery beyond the city, were the fascination of the festival, helped by front-page color coverage in the *Washington Post*.

For me, the 2001 Smithsonian Folklife Festival was long in preparation and over in a flash. In more than 80 presentations over two weeks, it really was the New York food voices, the cooking along with the stories, that spoke so richly of identity and dynamism in our fair town.

Annie Hauck-Lawson is an associate professor in the Department of Health and Nutrition Sciences at Brooklyn College. She lives in the Windsor Terrace section of Brooklyn and originated the concept of "food voice" to describe how food is used as a channel of communication.

PROGRAM SUMMARIES

TALKING TURKEY: A HISTORY OF THE TURKEY IN AMERICA

Andrew Smith

IN November, Andy Smith, a fellow culinary historian who is completing a book about the native American turkey, shared his insights on that subject in a rapid-fire, free-wheeling evening, fielding questions and comments from the audience throughout his talk.

He posed the question, “Why is there no record that the Puritans were amazed at their first encounter with this large American bird?” His answer was that the turkey got to Europe before the Puritans got to America and that it was far from an unknown quantity. And contrary to other foods from the New World like tomatoes and potatoes, the turkey was immediately welcomed. It was not so very different from other fowl that Europeans knew, and besides, it tasted so much better.

Andy went on to explain the confusing etymology of the word “turkey,” and noted that some Native Americans thought turkeys were cowardly and wouldn’t eat the bird, preferring instead to use the feathers for blankets and robes as well as headdresses and arrows. He added that at first domesticated turkeys were always much smaller than their wild brethren. Only after the wild turkey began to disappear did Americans turn their



attention to the domesticated turkey. Today’s turkey was the result of government-conducted breeding experiments that began in the 1880s. These experiments created the economical turkey that we know and love. The price fell and turkey became the ideal centerpiece of a meal for a large family gathering.

Before and after the meeting members enjoyed wine with some turkey dishes prepared by our host for the evening, Linda Pelaccio, from recipes dating back to 1871. The recipes took advantage of leftovers, a practice much valued in the days when the turkey was so much more expensive than it is today.

—JOHN JENKINS

THE TASTE OF CHOCOLATE

Maricel Presilla

ON December 18 we were feted with a chocolate tasting and an explanation of the differences of cacao beans and how they are analogous to the differences in coffee beans. Maricel, whose book, *The New Taste of Chocolate: A Cultural and Natural History of Cacao with Recipes*, was published last year, emphasized the importance of careful handling and drying of the beans. She provided an extensive chocolate spread including hot chocolate. The lecture also provided a chocolate tasting similar to a wine tasting to illustrate the vast differences and historical backgrounds of the chocolate flavors.

—DORIS WEISBERG

FOOD HISTORY COMES OF AGE: PITFALLS, PRATFALLS, AND REVELATIONS

William Woys Weaver

WILL Weaver aimed to shake up the field of food history in his talk on February 19 and called on his fellow culinary historians to do the same. His feeling is that culinary history has inherited a lot of material from the past and much of it erroneous, based on false assumptions. We must look at the subject creatively, and follow all paths in our research, not just the traditional ones, he said, urging his audience to use works of art, advertising, archeology, architecture, history, etymology—whatever it takes to locate the true history and origins of the subject and never take anything at face value. Even ancient Arab cookbooks, long assumed to be authentically Arab, were actually assembled from a variety of other sources, such as Egyptian, Greek, and Armenian, and often written by Christians.

Taking the Russian samovar as his starting point, he traced the “traditional” methods of finding its origins. Considered a Russian creation, the samovar had been shown by other researchers to have become popular only in the 19th century, and then, only as the aristocracy began drinking tea. The vessel itself was conclusively stated by these researchers to be of Asian origin. But by thinking “outside of the box,” using archeological, architectural, and etymological

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paths, Will discovered that the samovar actually had its roots in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean region.

Will has long been regarded as one of the leading authorities on heirloom vegetables and grows about 3,500 varieties in his garden. He came to this field via both the inheritance of his grandfather's seed collection and his desire to recreate historic recipes using authentic ingredients, including ancient strains of wheat and nearly extinct vegetables. His classic book, *Heirloom Vegetable Gardening: A Master Guide to Planting, Seed saving and Cultural History*, reflects this interest.

Recently, his sleuthing for the true origins of ancient food products has led him in a new direction—this time to Cyprus, where the discovery of a Minoan distillery has peaked his curiosity. And it's sure to provide more fascinating grist for his historical mill.

—HELEN STUDLEY

SALT: A WORLD HISTORY

Mark Kurlansky

ON Thursday evening, March 14, Program Chairman Helen Studley introduced Mark Kurlansky, the author of the book *Salt: A World History*. Mark then led the historians on a fascinating journey through time by discussing the effect salt has had on our world. When man left his hunter-gathering ways and settled into an agricultural style of living, finding sources of salt first became important. Salt is necessary for all animal life. When they began to domesticate animals instead of hunting

them, farmers had to find salt for their herds.

Mark went on to trace the history of salt's effect on trade, on founding cities, on preserving food and Egyptian bodies, how salt taxes built the Great Wall of China, how the search for salt led to the discovery of oil and natural gas deposits. You couldn't have a decent war without salt. Armies needed salt to feed their horses, to make their gunpowder, and to heal their wounds. Countries in northern Europe had to import salt from the hotter climes in the south where seawater could evaporate in large ponds leaving behind salty crystals. Queen Elizabeth I was heard to complain about Britain's "dangerous dependency on costly foreign salt."

Mark passed around samples of salt for us to taste from all over the world: salt dyed red from Hawaiian clay, gray sea salt from the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts of France, bright white salt from Trapani in Sicily, and a solid block of salt from a salt mine in Austria. He said it was only in the early 20th century that a man named Morton invented a way to purify salt so that it was uniform in taste and color. He pointed out the irony that today's chefs favor the taste that different minerals give to the impure salts.

After a lively Q & A, the audience finished what was left of the wine and the edibles provided before the talk began, all foods closely associated with salt: prosciutto, cheese, olives, tapenade, kimchee, either donated by Agata & Valentina or prepared by Stacey Harwood or Bill Ciampa.

—JOHN JENKINS

WEBSITES OF CULINARY INTEREST

www.gac.edu/groups/convivium
(on food and philosophy)

<http://www.gti.net/mocolib1/kid/food1.html> (extensive list of culinary history links)

http://www.qmfound.com/history_of_rations.htm (history of military rations)

www.thousandeggs.com (Renaissance and Medieval food history)

www.kstrom.net/isk/food
(native american history)

www.essaypage.com (summaries are free, but charges \$8.95 for actual essays, including many on food)

MEMBER NEWS

Susan Baldassano is leading two culinary/cultural tours to Sicily in May. These are small groups, maximum 12 participants, combining informal cooking classes with cultural touring. There are two different itineraries. Her website at ToGrandmothersHouseWeGo.com provides information or call (718) 459-0582 or (212) 645-5170 ext. 111. Special offers are available to Culinary Historians.

At the IACP convention in San Diego, **Betty Fussell** appeared on a panel with Irena Chalmers and Darra Goldstein discussing “Evolution of a Career,” in keeping with the convention theme of “Catching the Wave” of change. She asserts that “One major change for all of us is the coming of age in America of food history as a subject with academic clout and with outreach to the general public. It’s about time.”

Judith Hausman, food critic for *The Journal News* (Gannett Suburban Newspapers in Westchester, Putnam and Rockland Counties), attended the Gastronomica/IACP Conference in Williamstown, Mass., last fall. Her interview of Annie Farrell, a key figure in sustainable agriculture in the Hudson Valley, will appear in *Gastronomica* this summer. Judith is working on a piece on colonial Sephardic Jewish foodways and immigration to the Hudson Valley. Informational leads for this piece would be welcomed and can be forwarded to her at hauswriter@aol.com.

Matt Lee and his brother Ted (now contributing editors at *Travel and Leisure* magazine) are designing an authentic Appalachian Kentucky dinner with traditional blue grass music at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), in North Adams, Mass., on April 20. They will be speaking about the food during the meal. The ticket price is \$30 and tickets can be purchased online as well as by phone. More info can be found online at the MASS MoCA web site: http://www.massmoca.org/performing_arts/index.html. A feature on their travels through Kentucky appears in the March issue of *Food & Wine* magazine.

David Leite, a freelance food writer whose specialty is Portuguese cuisine, has recently returned from exploring the cuisine of the Azores from where his family emigrated.

Jane Wilson Morton's new book, *Farmstand Companion*, co-authored with Marianne K. Preston, describes the farmstand as historically being a community's “social connectors” as these small and personal farmstands created a sense of identity and place and one that told the story of a town's inhabitants. The history is followed by 70 pages of recipes.

Marion Nestle's new book, *Food Politics*, describes how our too efficient food industry is affecting our health by persuading people to eat more. Marion is professor and chair of the Department of Nutri-

tion and Food Studies at New York University. For more information on her book, visit www.ucpress.edu/books/pages/9518.html.

Owner **Glenn Roberts** reports that Anson Mills Historic Heirloom Grain Products, including colonial-style parched corn flour and meal, is now available at Dean & DeLuca NYC, Charlotte, N.C., and Washington, D.C. Glenn recently lectured on the history of grits and corn mush at the Southern Foodways Alliance at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, University of Mississippi, and on historic grains and milling at the Annual Sustainable Agriculture Conference at Historic Brattensville, at Fort Mill, S.C.

Peter G. Rose's upcoming book, *Matters of Taste: Food and Drink in 17th-Century Dutch Art and Life* (Syracuse University Press), will be released in September 2002. It gives an overview of Dutch culinary history from the Middle Ages until the 21st century and discusses in detail the foodstuffs shown in some 60 17th-century paintings by Dutch Masters. Co-author Donna R. Barnes, Ed. D., professor at Hofstra University, discusses Dutch art as it relates to images of food and drink and the symbolism found in still life paintings and genre scenes. The book contains a separate smaller cookbook of adapted recipes for the modern kitchen, which was edited by fellow culinary historian **Stephen Schmidt**.

To celebrate the 350th anniversary of the founding of Albany (originally named Beverwijck by the Dutch prior to its being ceded to the English and renamed in 1664), an exhibition co-curated by

CULINARY BOOKSHELF

the authors and with the same name as the book will open at the Albany Institute of History and Art on September 20 and run through December 8. It will bring together Dutch paintings in which food and drink play prominent roles. Still-life paintings and genre pictures featuring taverns, market kitchens, and scenes of festive occasions by more than 30 Dutch artists will be shown for the first time together with an array of decorative art objects. A selection of historic Dutch and Dutch American cookbooks and advice manuals on food and drink will also be on display.

The University of Illinois Press will release *Peanuts: The Illustrious History of the Goober Pea* written by **Andrew F. Smith**. The book traces the rise of the lowly peanut from a slave food to a mainstream American staple. It includes more than 70 historical recipes.

Richard Tarlov recently completed work on opening the American Market Café at Copia: The American Center for Wine, Food and the Arts in Napa, California. Tarlov, a retail specialty food consultant, shaped a food program based on American farmstead cheese and charcuterie, and artisan confectionery from around the US, and nostalgic soft drinks.

William Woys Weaver has been named professor of culinary arts and food studies at Drexel University in Philadelphia, and will be offering a credit course on food history in 2003. Check the Drexel University website for details.

The Scent of Orange Blossoms: Sephardic Cuisine from Morocco

By Kitty Morse and Danielle Mamane
(Ten Speed Press, 2001)

REVIEW BY SUSAN MILLER, M.S.,R.D.

THIS collection of memories, recipes, and nostalgic photographs is an inviting story of the cuisine and life of a Moroccan Jewish family. Sephardic Jews from areas of North Africa and Spain, driven from their homes by the Inquisition and persecutions, found refuge for a time in Morocco; thus, their foods were a mélange of pan-Sephardic themes and Spanish and Arabic influences. Certain indigenous ingredients and menu constructs were modified to comply with the dietary laws of Kashruth.

For many readers, the book's best feature will be the story of Mamane's family, including co-author Danielle Mamane, many of whom still live in Morocco. Family letters and charming anecdotes illustrate Moroccan daily Jewish life in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Mamane contributes the history and recipes. Co-author Morse is an accomplished food writer and cook. The beautifully written introduction is rich in culinary history. Many recipes are pure Moroccan, without regard to religious origin. None are complicated. The salads with preserved lemon are particularly refreshing.

Quenelles de Poisson a la Sauce Tomate sounds much better than Fish Dumplings in Tomato Sauce—and seems like a Mediterranean Gefilte Fish, but there is no binder, not even matzo meal. Moroccan candied carrots, sweet fruit relishes, a wonderful carrot salad, or the Fish Fillets Fez Style (with turmeric and preserved kumquats), are frequently served for Rosh Hashanah. Pickled vegetables are an easy, if time consuming, affair requiring 18 lemons and a lot of prep work. I doubt many readers will invest the time, but it is worth trying. The book's version of the famous spice blend, *Ras El Hanout*, is drastically shortened from the traditional 30-plus ingredients, and resembles our "pumpkin pie spice."

Sample menus are given for the Jewish holidays and almost every dish appears in full color. Esthetically it's a compact and beautiful, high-quality book on glossy stock. You don't want to bring this one near the couscoussiere! Today, travelers never find these dishes in restaurants; as with so many places, you need to be invited to private homes.

Susan Miller is a registered dietitian who, in finding the culinary arena more interesting and creative, made the switch from clinical to food service and business in 1989. The specialty of her company, La Table dans le Bon Sens, is formula and recipe analysis and product labeling.

REGIONAL CALENDAR

Sunday May 5, 3-4:30 p.m.

“Finding Our Heritage Through Cookbooks,” sponsored by the New York Women’s Culinary Alliance.

Barbara Haber, curator of books at the Schlesinger Library at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies at Harvard University.

Please contact Grace Young at (212) 673-7343, or wisdom@graceyoung.com; or Shelley Menaged at jbfmenaged@pipeline.com. Space is limited.

Give to a Friend: A CHNY Membership Application

At monthly meetings, the Culinary Historians of New York explore the historic, esoteric, and entertaining byways of food. These events are led by noted historians, authors, anthropologists, and food experts, many of whom are CHNY members.

Membership benefits include advance notice of all events, a membership directory, and the CHNY Newsletter with culinary history articles, news of members, events, and book reviews.

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Corporate – \$125 per year Student/Senior – \$20 per year
Senior Household – \$30 per year

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Culinary Interests (12 words max; information to appear in the next CHNY directory)

Willing to help with: Programs: _____ Membership: _____ Newsletter: _____

Please make check payable to CHNY and send with completed form to: The Culinary Historians of New York, Wendy Clapp-Shapiro, PMB #133, 2565 Broadway, New York, NY 10025-5657.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Tuesday, May 14

“Wine and Spirits in Ancient China” — Edith J. Frankel

Wednesday, September 18

Members-only get together and business meeting followed by dinner

Thursday, October 17

“New York State Artisan Cheeses” — Robert Kaufelt



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•CULINARY HISTORIANS OF NEW YORK•

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