

FALL 2002

Culinary Historians of Chicago

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Fellow CHCers,

In August, yours truly presented a program based on our PBS program, "Hidden India: the Kerala Spicelands." The real author of the program and its musical score, Jan Thompson, was stuck in the hard clay of southern Illinois, so Elizabeth Richter, the Executive Producer, and I muddled through. Naturally, it wasn't possible to cover everything in the talk, just as we couldn't possibly cover everything about Kerala: like all of India, it is an immensely complex society. The language, Malayalam (pron. Mal-YA-lam, but without accented syllables), alone is hard to get one's tongue around. For instance the official name of the state capital, Trivandrum, is Thiruvananthapuram. Fortunately, many Keralites speak English (a charming Indian version – Jan always enjoyed being called "Madam") and their cuisines are definitely easy to mouth. Better still, these are about the friendliest people we have ever encountered. Outsiders such as ourselves could hardly go anywhere without local people almost literally dragging us into their houses for a "little refreshment, Sir and Madame." Would that we Americans were so polite or could be so friendly.

When Kerala is mentioned to most non-Keralite Indians they usually say: "beautiful place." But they hardly ever say "great cuisine." The first impression is mostly true, the second depends on one's tastes and what Keralite cuisine is. The state has two distinct geographical/climatic regions. The 330-mile-long coastal strip is mainly flat with climate that we reptilians like – warm to hot and mostly humid. The beaches are good and largely undeveloped for tourism, the northern coast used by people who fish for a living. Just inland is where most of the population lives. A main road, to stretch the word's meaning, runs from Cranganore in the north to Trivandrum in the south. Along its sometimes double lanes are jammed villages, hamlets, street markets, people walking or riding bicycles, cattle and any other living thing in the state. It is colorful and culturally fascinating, but not exactly the scenic wonders that state tourism promotes. In the coastal center are the famous waterways, especially around Alleppey and Kottayam with rice paddies interspersed between small hamlets. To the east the land rises into the Cardamon Hills. Scenic, with a very pleasant climate, this region holds wildlife refuges, rubber and cardamon plantations, forests, and gorgeous tea plantations. We discovered that the state is so colorful, everywhere, that it would be hard not to have excellent images for a program.

Those who have read Kristin Eddy's (one of our recent speakers) articles in the *Chicago Tribune* about Keralite cuisine may have some idea of what it is. It, too, falls into categories, in this case, grouped by religions. There are three with subdivisions in each: Hindus (60%); Muslims (20%); and Christians (20%). Jews should be added to the mix because a good-sized population lived here for close to 2,000 years, at least until most migrated to Israel.

Northern Indians usually find Muslim dishes familiar, and so

would most Chicagoans who dine in our region's Indian restaurants (Udupi Palace, south Indian and vegetarian, on Devon Avenue is an exception). Lamb curries, Biryanis and Pulaos, samosas, wheat flour Nan, Paneer Mattar, and even Tandoori Chicken appear on menus. The spicing and preparations of these dishes differ from the other Kerala cuisines: the masalas, for example, must be well-fried in ghee (clarified butter). Biryani and Tandoori Chicken, northern in origin, have become national Indian dishes and are found in restaurants great and small throughout Kerala.

There are some 20 different Christian sects in the state, but dishes are fairly similar among them. Lacking the same Muslim and upper caste Hindu dietary restrictions, Christians eat a wide variety of dishes. Mrs. K.M. Mathew, the doyenne of Kerala cookery, says that a Christmas feast might include fried meats, fried fish, fish curries, fish with grated coconut, chicken curry, chicken Korma, and lots of chutneys. One ingredient always associated with Christian cookery in central Kerala is cocum, a small, slightly sourish relative of tamarind. Think any of this would serve as Christmas dinner in the USA?

Hindus have always been divided by caste and class, though in Kerala the "traditional system" has been almost completely broken down. Nevertheless, people who follow the Brahminic ways remain strict vegetarians, while those whose ancestry lay in the lower castes, such as Nairs, eat animal protein – especially fish. Kerala's greatest Hindu, and now universally celebrated, festival is the New Year, called Onam. Traditional Hindu dishes served for it illustrate just what the cuisine is. Bananas, pappads (thin rice-flour crepes), banana and jackfruit chips, lime and mango pickles, Thoren (a spicy slaw), Avial (vegetable stew), lemon curry (!), Pachadis (thick, lightly cooked, vegetable curries usually with coconut) and many more. The old way to serve the meal is to spread a large banana leaf out, place a heap of rice in the center, and surround it with pickles, chutneys, accompanied by bowlfuls of the other preparations. These are all eaten by hand, the only way that civilized people eat (like the ancient Greeks and Romans).

What all Kerala cuisines have in common are some native ingredients. Coconut is used in almost everything, as are curry leaves. The latter are used extensively in Keralite, Cambodian, Laotian, Thai Indonesian and Malay cuisine as a seasoning-similar to Bay Leaves. Get some in an Indian store and you'll be amazed at the wonderful flavor they have. Of course, black pepper, cardamon, ginger, and turmeric are grown locally and used widely. This being a coastal land with many freshwater rivers, fish of both types are staples. Of all the staples, though, one is the absolute center – rice. Just after World War II a new way of preparing rice was introduced into the state, parboiling. Along the waterways during the harvest season, you might see women standing before a huge metal pot stirring the new rice. It is

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(President's Letter continued)

cooked only so that the outer shell is removed, leaving the other six husks with all of their nutritional values intact. The rice is then dried and kept for the rest of the year. The rice has a different texture and flavor than one is used to, but it is more nutritionally sound than polished rice.

Obviously, there is a lot more. If you attended the meeting mentioned here, then you tried some of the Kerala dishes made by our very own culinary explorer, Barbara Olson. Since members asked for recipes, here they are. One more note. I haven't seen Mrs. Mathew's books in the U.S., though she has trained many of India's greatest chefs! They are published by her family newspaper publishing company and are distributed by Current Books in Kottayam, Kerala. I do not have any address, but try the internet. The most accessible of her many books is *The Family Cook Book*. Let me know if you have any luck. Recipes on pages 4 and 5.

Bruce Kraig, October 2002, Carbondale, Illinois

FRIED IN THE HEARTLAND

By Elizabeth D. Richter

The descendant of European bakers and son of a father who made spaghetti sauce with Jewish salami, Dr. Bruce Kraig perhaps inevitably gravitated toward the world of food. Working on his Ph.D. in History and Archeology from the University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Kraig found himself thinking about food in the field. "I did my doctoral research in deserted medieval English villages and began to wonder what the peasant really ate. All these societies (as well as ours) were based on food production."

Now based in Makanda, Illinois, near Southern Illinois University where his wife Jan Thompson teaches documentary production, Dr. Kraig is expanding his knowledge of Southern Illinois cuisine. His paper, "Fried in the Heartland," presented at this year's Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, focused on the food-stuffs and techniques typical of this part of the state. "If you can cook it, you can fry it" appears to be the mantra of local cooks.

At his well-attended presentation, Dr. Kraig found that Europeans like the Irish seemed to "like the linkages between their traditional food practices and those transported to America. Some thought that [my] descriptions of southern Illinois culture were unique and amusing, much like the mythical Lake Woebegone of Prairie Home Companion fame."

Dr. Kraig's first paper for the Oxford Symposium was on food taboos, and he made the mistake of joking that "we could solve world hunger by eating our dogs." Dr. Kraig realized he'd been taken seriously, "I received a huge amount of hate mail, death threats, and more! So I wrote a paper on why we westerners do not eat dogs. It caused a sensation in the media in Britain."

Inspired by an Oxford Symposium on street food, Dr. Kraig made the short jump to writing about hot dogs and found his niche. He has lectured in Asia, Europe, and Australia on the history of the hot dog, not to mention appearances on *Nightline*, *Good Morning America* and numerous other television programs. In his hot dog class at Roosevelt, where he is now Professor Emeritus in History, he would bring an old Sunbeam electric fry pan to class to make samples of different kinds of hotdogs for his students.

His culinary curiosity extends far beyond hot dogs. In addition to serving as founder and president of the Culinary Historians of Chicago, Dr. Kraig hosts a series of PBS specials called "Hidden Journeys" with programs on culinary traditions in China, Mexico, Korea, and most recently India. "Hidden India: The Kerala Spicelands," broadcast nationally and on WTTW/Channel 11 in August, explores the spice-centered culture of the southwest coast of India. A program on the culinary traditions of Turkey is in production.

FIXED ON FAT

The 2002 Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery

By Elizabeth D. Richter

Few of us can spread a pat of butter or add cream to our coffee without a pang of guilt. Fat is bad. The evil "F" word is ingrained in our psyche. Imagine the pleasure, then, for 170 food writers and culinary historians from Chicago and around the globe who gathered last month at St. Antony's College in the 12th-century college town of Oxford, England, to spend three days talking about, lecturing about, learning about, and yes, eating fat, all kinds of fat.

Fats, in case you're not clear on what packs all those calories, are made up of carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen and belong to a group of substances scientifically known as lipids. They can be of the animal kind, as in lard and butter, or the vegetable kind, as in canola oil, olive oil, or coconut oil. But its source doesn't tell one much about a fat's taste or how it's used. The Oxford Symposium set out to shed some light on the subject.

St. Antony's College itself cannot claim 12th-century roots, having been founded a mere fifty years ago, quite recent by Oxford standards. But this venerable symposium (whose participants are known in British syntax as "symposiasts") draws upon over two thousand years of recorded history on food. The subject of fat, both animal and vegetable, was dissected by the experts, plus a few interested amateurs, in 37 papers presented to symposiasts in 22 sessions. Topics ranged from fats in medieval England to the diet of Japanese Sumo wrestlers to dumba, the sheep-tail fat prized in Uzbekistan. Meals, of course, were built around fat, and featured just about everything you think you're not supposed to eat.

The universal language of the conference was surely humor. Fat by its very nature tickles a multi-national funny bone. "We are at our most intimate with our environment when we are eating it" began British historian and author Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, whose *Near a Thousand Tables: A History of Food* has just been published in the U.S. He delighted delegates with his observations about "the enormous success of our species in mastering fat." He pointed out the all too familiar paradox that while today's society celebrates slimness, we're getting fatter all the time.

Using such images as the ample women painted by Rubens and Botera, the hefty U.S. president William Howard Taft, and Twiggy, he offered a lively history of humankind's historic ambivalence about fat. In the final analysis, he noted, neither health, capitalism, male attitudes toward women, nor fashion, all commonly blamed for our fat obsession, account for the rise in obesity. Fernandez-Armesto subscribes to the much-debated theory that the upper classes need to separate themselves from the lower. So, if food is scarce and only the rich have access, it's chic to be stout. Conversely, with food abundant and available to the poor, the only option the rich have to set themselves apart is thinness.

Eyeing their waistlines to determine their social status, symposiasts eagerly sought new insights about fat, both culinary and cultural. Additional subjects included coconut culture in the Philippines, Iran's reliance on animal fats, "ghee" (clarified butter) as a ritual food in modern India, and fat-laden pastries from the island of Crete. Outside the U.S., it seems, fat is a highly prized ingredient.

In some countries, attitudes about fat are particularly inconsistent. The Japanese, anthropologist Michael Ashkenazi reported, frown on obesity, yet celebrate the popular Sumo wrestler. These mammoth entertainers can weigh in over 300 pounds, sustained by a diet of chanko-nabe (a stew of fish, vegetables, and meat), mochi (a dough-like substance made of glutinous rice pounded in a hollow tree trunk), and beer. Such is the wrestlers' discipline that having methodically gained enormous amounts of weight, once they retire from the ring for another career, they can drop half their body weight in six months. It's good luck, by the way, to pat a Sumo wrestler's belly.

This year's topic of fat was suggested by Dr. Bruce Kraig,

Professor Emeritus in History at Chicago's Roosevelt University. "Fat has become so important a topic these days. . . it is the great Satan," he observed. Currently president of the Culinary Historians of Chicago, Dr. Kraig is a true connoisseur of fat, being an internationally recognized expert on the history of the hot dog. He came to Oxford prepared to share the secrets of Southern Illinois cooking in a paper appropriately titled "Fried in the Heartland".

Chicago was also represented by Dr. Russell Zanca, assistant professor of anthropology at Northeastern Illinois University, an expert in Uzbekistan and it turns out, sheep fat. In his field studies in Uzbekistan, Dr. Zanca has seen. . . and eaten. . . food literally swimming in cottonseed oil, the most common fat in this major cotton-producing nation. Yet, the older members of the population yearn for the once more-available fat from the tail of the sheep unique to that country.

The Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery has been held every year but one since 1981 when Dr. Theodore Zeldin and Alan Davidson (author of the Oxford Companion to Food) both in residence at St. Antony's College, were spurred by a common interest in food history to launch a series of seminars. The conference would soon become an annual magnet for anyone with a serious interest in learning what's behind what's on one's plate. Past participants counted such luminaries of the food world as Elizabeth David and Julia Child. This year attendees included Chef Fritz Blank of Philadelphia's Deux Cheminees (once a student of Chicago's late Chef Louis Szathmary), British food writer Caroline Conran, and *Vogue* magazine food editor Jeffrey Steingarten.

Retired Birmingham, England, businessman Harlan Walker epitomizes the amateur food enthusiast who makes the yearly pilgrimage. Editor of the symposium papers published each year, he is infinitely curious about food and sees the conference as a way to cut through food industry jargon. "It's quite difficult to communicate even between the English and Americans about food. Here you have to talk in a language everyone understands."

From a health perspective, the conference did not attempt to resolve the current debate over high vs low fat diets. Australian Cardiologist Dr. David Kelly has spent his professional life trying to get people to stop eating fat. Explaining that the chemistry of fat's taste appeal is due to its ability to dissolve spices and add new textures to recipes, he outlined the evils of saturated and trans fats and the value of monosaturated fats like olive oil, key to the Mediterranean diet. In seeming contradiction, British nutrition writer Barry Groves described his own weight loss while on a high fat diet, disputed the dangers of saturated fat in coconut oil and quoted studies supporting better overall health produced by low carbohydrate diets.

Conferees, however, did not let unresolved health issues stop them from frequent sampling. Oil tastings offered olive, coconut, walnut, hazelnut, almond, and argan, a nutty flavored oil from the stone of a Morocco fruit. Animal fats were also in abundance at a tasting of top quality English creams featuring single cream, double cream, and thick clotted cream.

But the most anticipated tasting provided samples of lardo, an Italian specialty made in Tuscany from the raw back fat of Cinta Senese pigs. Marinated in salt, herbs, and spices in large marble vats, blocks of fat miraculously turn into an unusual delicacy. Once considered a poor man's food, lardo is served thinly sliced on bread with tomatoes, walnuts, and sometimes honey.

Saturday's "fat dinner" was the gastronomic highlight of the weekend. Jane Levi, this year's conference organizer, confided that she and dinner planners, Caroline Conran and Anissa Helou, struggled to include as many fats as possible without overwhelming guests. By all accounts, they were successful. Roasted nuts, exotic salamis, duck fat, walnut oil, ice cream and double cream for raspberries notwithstanding, all guests and this reporter were able to stand up from the table.

The menu and accompanying wines:

THE FAT DINNER

Sardinian Olives
Roasted Almonds

Selection of Sardinian Charcuterie

Salsiccia sarda, lardo, guanciale, coppa detesta, coppa, roast pork loin with myrtle

Stuffed Sundried Tomatoes

Confit of Duck

Potato wedges, fried in duck fat

Salad of Small Mixed leaves dressed with Walnut Oil

Robin Weir's Tokai Aszu Sorbet

Hill Station Strong Vanilla Bean Ice Cream

Raspberries

Double Cream

Coffee

Cardamom and Saffron flavoured Rococo Truffles

WINES

Fino, Tio Pepe

Mourvedre, Domaine La Condamine l'Eveque 1999,

Chateau La Bronne, Corbieres 2000,

"LVR" Les Vignes Retroubees, Cotes de St. Mont 2001

Fortified by splendid meals, the food-addicted also found ample shopping opportunities. On-site vendors set up tables selling volumes from previous conferences and offered many works by conferees. The most delicious cover design award goes to Robin Weir's *Ices: The Definitive Guide*. His recipes ranging from geranium leaf ice cream to one flavored with Stilton cheese speak to Weir's obsession with ice cream. He told tablemates that he'd collected so much ice-cream related paraphernalia that he's planning to open an ice cream museum.

Brighton-based antiquarian bookseller Liz Steeber turned cookbook lovers into collectors with her table of second-hand and antique publications. One attendee was pleased to find an extra copy of his own out-of-print cookbook. Her catalogue lists such classics as an 1851 first edition of *The Book of Household Management*, by Mrs. Isabella Beeton, for just under \$1500.

Hardly the usual conference vendor, a nearby "Bring and Buy" table gave participants in the 21st Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery the chance to empty their own pantries and share the produce of their gardens, while raising money to support the Symposium. One could pick up everything from an organic quince to a handful of medlars, small fruits favored in Tudor England, and for the more practical shopper, a Japanese product that solidifies cooking fat for easy disposal.

Next year's symposium will focus on Food and Nurture, with a focus on children. One can imagine pudding, pablum, and pizza research underway already. Papers from previous symposia are published by Prospect Books and are available at: <http://store.yahoo.com/acanthus-books/aboxsym.html> and <http://www.kal69.dial.pipex.com/oxford.htm>

Elizabeth D. Richter is a consultant and principal of The Richter Group. She also enjoys historically significant meals of all kinds.

Recipes for Kerala Event

Sambar is a kind of soupy vegetable stew that is served with soured rice-dal cakes. Thoran is a standard kind of "salad" that's really good. The Urad dal that's put in it works like this: when fried they turn reddish and give a nutty flavor to anything that's cooked with it. As you requested, here's also a chicken-tamarind dish. However, the signature Kerala dish is Fish Molee. I have made it using chicken. To do that, omit the vinegar in Fish Molee I (Mrs. Mathew's version), but do everything else.

SAMBAR I

1 cup yellow split peas (tur or tuvar dal)
1 medium eggplant, cut into long slices
2-3 small zucchini, cut into long slices
1 medium onion, cut into long slices
2 T. tamarind paste
4 cups water
4 (or less) t. salt
1/2 t. ground Turmeric
pinch asafoetida or hing

SAMBAR SPICE MIXTURE

2 T. fresh grated coconut
1/4 t. fenugreek seeds
2 t. coriander seeds
5 small hot chiles (or to taste), seeded and thinly sliced into rounds
1/2 t. brown mustard seeds (yellow if these are not available)
15 curry leaves, if available
1-2 T. cooking oil

Soak dal for at least 4 hours or until soft, or boil gently 45-60 minutes, until soft. Drain. Place vegetables in deep pan with water. Stir in tamarind paste until dissolved. Add salt, turmeric and asafoetida. Bring to boil, reduce heat and cook until vegetables are tender. Heat cooking oil in a skillet; when hot, toss in spice mixture and stir fry until coconut browns and mustard seeds pop. Stir into the sambar. Cook a little more and serve. *Serves 4...* but as a sampler might be 8-10?

SAMBAR II

1/2 cup tuvar dal or yellow split peas
2 medium onions
10 or 12 (fresh or frozen) okra
3 large tomatoes, quartered
4 cups water
2 T. tamarind paste
1 T. coriander powder
1 T. chili powder
1 t. turmeric powder
1/2 t. fenugreek powder
1/2 t. asafoetida powder
1 t. mustard seeds
1 T. vegetable oil
salt to taste
4 T. chopped coriander leaves
curry leaves - a few (optional)

Cook the dal with chopped onions, turmeric powder, chili powder and sufficient water. Cut the okra in 2-inch pieces and sauté them in a frying pan with one teaspoon oil until dry and slightly browned. Mash the cooked dal with a wooden spoon and add the salt, coriander powder, fenugreek powder, asafoetida powder, and the tamarind extract. Simmer for a few minutes and add the tomatoes and okra and half of the coriander leaves. When the vegetables are cooked, heat oil in a fry pan with a splatter screen or a lid and pop the mustard seeds. Remove pan from the heat, add the curry leaves. Add this seasoning to the sambar and garnish with the rest of the coriander leaves.

Hint: Other vegetables that can be added to sambar are potatoes (which do not freeze well), shallots, pearl onions (available frozen), cucumber, Indian or oriental eggplant (baingan), beans, carrots, lima beans or squash.

CABBAGE THORAN

3 cups thinly sliced cabbage
1/2 t. turmeric powder
1/2 t. cumin seeds
2-3 hot green chilies, seeded and sliced
1/2 cup dried or fresh coconut
3 cloves garlic, crushed and chopped
1 small onion, thinly sliced
1 t. urad dal (this is a small pale yellow split pea)
1/2 t. mustard seeds
curry leaves - a few
1 t. cooking oil
salt to taste

Heat the oil on medium heat and add the mustard seeds. When they pop, add the urad dal and curry leaves. Then add the onions and sauté until browned. Now add the cabbage, turmeric powder and salt. Stir for a while, lower the heat and cook covered for 5 minutes. Crush the garlic and cumin seeds and add to the cabbage along with the green chilies and the coconut. Stir for a few more minutes and remove from heat.

CHICKEN WITH GREEN CHILIES & TAMARIND

A rich, piquant curry from the Jews of Kochi, who enjoyed very spicy foods like this green chili-laced curry. Because of the quantity of chilies called for, remove their seeds so their flavor can come through without the burning heat. It is not necessary to remove the chilies from the dish before serving.

1/2 t. tamarind concentrate
7 to 10 fresh green chilies (serrano or Thai), to taste
5 T. vegetable oil
12 to 15 fresh curry leaves
2 cups sliced onions
2 t. minced garlic
2 t. minced ginger

Ground masala:

3 t. coriander
1 t. cumin
1/4 t. turmeric
1/8 t. cayenne
1 cup chopped tomato
1 t. salt
1/2 t. sugar
2 pounds boneless skinless chicken thighs,
trimmed and cut into 1-inch cubes

1. In a small bowl, combine the tamarind concentrate and 2 table-spoons hot water. Using your fingers, break up tamarind to dissolve completely.

2. If your fingers are sensitive, wear rubber gloves for this step. Remove and discard stems from green chilies and slice in half lengthwise. With a sharp knife remove seeds and ribs; discard. Set chilies aside.

3. In a wide, deep pan heat the oil over medium high heat. Toss in the curry leaves and after they crackle for a few seconds add the onion and fry until soft. Stir in the garlic, ginger, and green chilies and fry until the onion begins to brown. Add the ground masala, tomato, salt, sugar, and 1 cup water and fry until tomato breaks down and mixture becomes paste-like. Sprinkle in a little more water if the mixture dries out.

4. Put in the chicken and dissolved tamarind and simmer over medium low heat, covered, for 35 to 40 minutes, stirring occasionally. The sauce should be moderately thick. Taste for salt before serving.

Serves: 6 to 8

Hint: Recipe can be prepared a day in advance and reheated.

FISH MOLEE I

(adapted from Mrs. K.M. Mathews' Kerala Cookery)
(Kottayam, Kerala, 1985)

2 t. coriander powder
1 t. chili powder
1/2 t. turmeric powder
1/4 t. dried mustard
1/4 t. freshly ground black pepper
2 T. peanut oil
1/2 cup sliced onions
1 T. chopped fresh ginger
3 long green chilies (cayenne or serrano), slit along one side
5-6 fresh curry leaves
1/2 t. finely chopped garlic
1 lb. fish fillets (ocean perch or whitefish will do),
cut into 2-inch x 2-inch pieces
1/2 t. white vinegar
salt to taste
water to cover fish
1 cup coconut milk, mixed with 1 cup water.

Stir together the coriander powder, chili powder, turmeric powder, dried mustard and ground black pepper. Heat oil in a deep, heavy skillet. Add onion and sauté until translucent. Add green chilies and sauté until soft. Add mixed powders and sauté well, stirring until well mixed. Add curry leaves and garlic and sauté gently until garlic just turns color. Add fish to pan together with vinegar and salt. Add fish and water to just cover fish. Bring water to gentle boil, cover pan and cook until the water is reduced to half its volume, about 5-10 minutes. Pour in the coconut milk and stir the coconut milk gently to mix with spices. Cook gently, uncovered until the sauce becomes thickened to taste, about 5 minutes or more. Place on warm serving plate and serve with lots of rice. *Serves 4.*

FISH MOLEE II

Molee is one of the best-known fish curries in Kerala and the Syrian Christians and Hindus are especially fond of it.

4 T. vegetable oil
2 cups thinly sliced onions
2 medium garlic cloves, thinly sliced
6 thin slices ginger
1 fresh green chile (serrano or Thai) split lengthwise
10 to 12 fresh curry leaves

Ground masala:

1 t. coriander
1/4 t. cumin
1/4 t. turmeric
1/4 t. black pepper
1 cup chopped tomato, plus a few thinly sliced cross sections for garnish
1 t. salt
1-1/2 pounds skinned white fish fillets (cod or haddock), cut into 2-inch pieces
1/2 cup canned coconut milk

1. In a 12-inch frying pan with a lid, heat the oil. Fry the onions, garlic, ginger, green chile, and curry leaves until the onions are lightly browned. Add the ground masala, tomato, and salt and fry 10 to 15 minutes, until the tomato becomes soft and begins to break down.
2. Push the mixture to the sides of the pan and place the fish pieces in a single layer in the center. With a spatula, smear the paste over the fish. Combine the coconut milk with 1/2 cup water, and pour it over the fish. Gently shake the pan to circulate the liquid without disturbing the fish. Cover and cook at a low simmer for 10 minutes or more, depending on the thickness of the fish. It is not necessary to turn the fish, but if you wish to, do so very carefully so the pieces do not break apart. The sauce will be fairly thin. Check the salt.
3. Carefully transfer the fish pieces to a low serving bowl, pour the sauce over them. Garnish with the tomato slices and serve immediately. Preparation time: 40 minutes. *Serves 6.*

SIXTY YEARS OF REPASTS FROM THE PAGES OF GOURMET

By Barbara Olson

Endless Feasts: Sixty Years of Writing from Gourmet, edited and with introduction by Ruth Reichl.

Ruth Reichl is a famous restaurant critic and is now editor-in-chief of *Gourmet* magazine. She is also the author of the best selling memoirs: *Tender at the Bone*, and *Comfort Me with Apples*, and the editor of the Modern Library Food series.

In this anthology, Ruth Reichl has tried to chronicle eating and what people ate and who they were over the past 60 years. *Endless Feasts* is just a little snack, a sample tidbit of the many riches still hidden in the archives of the magazine. American food is a constantly changing representation of who we are. And what you will find in these pages is an ongoing history of our national adventures at the table.

The first article, written in 1941, is by M.F.K. Fisher and her memories of her time in Switzerland and the three wonderful restaurants she found there.

"Two for the Road," is completely different: A small town by the name of Havana in North Dakota lost their only café. When the regulars tried other places to meet, nothing worked. So the townspeople, the farmers and the grain workers pooled their money and bought the café. They divided the work between the people who love to cook and people who help serve. For the past 10 years, this has worked. Everyone comes now to eat, drink coffee and talk. At the end of this article are three recipes which were served at the Farmer's Inn.

Another article is about a chef who knew how to keep a job. "The Ritz in Retrospect," by Louis Diat, chronicles his tenure as executive chef of the Ritz Carlton for 40 years. He started the year the Ritz opened its doors, and was there when the doors closed in 1951. The day it opened there was a staff of 150 to take care of the dining room, and the dinner menu consisted of 16 items; each course had its own wine. When it closed, the menu was much shorter and simpler, reflecting the changing tastes and times.

Of all the Ritz specialties that Chef Diat had originated, it seems that vichyssoise was really the one that captured the fancy of Americans from coast to coast. But there have been many others which were popular with his guests: filet of sea bass Pershing, for example, was first served at the banquet given at the Ritz for General Pershing after World War I. Another of Chef Diat's popular dishes was poulet sauté Gloria Swanson which he concocted especially for the well-known actress and which he prepared on her television program. At the end of the article are recipes for both dishes.

This is what makes this book so exciting: you can make these recipes yourself and taste the food from a different era.

"Pueblo Indian Bread" is an article written by Caroline Bates in 1977, and it is the opposite of what people think *Gourmet* magazine is about. She wrote, "In cookery of the Zuni a century ago, one can recognize comparable dishes made in the present-day Rio Grande pueblos; but with modern cooking appliances there is little reason to bake breads between stones or in pits, and part of a rich heritage is receding into the past. Paper bread—some New Mexicans call it "sheet bread" or "stick bread"—is made occasionally, but only by very old women, and mastering the techniques of baking it is no longer a womanly art to which most Pueblo girls aspire. That it exists to the extent it does among the Hopi, can be explained by the relative purity of their culture and their dependence on corn instead of wheat. By contrast, three centuries of close contact with European ways has profoundly changed the New Mexican pueblos.

All these stories in the anthology help us to understand how important reading and books are in keeping traditions alive.

In my opinion, and with five stars, I recommend this book—for anyone who likes to read about food, food history and the people who make it their life.

October Guest Speaker Lara Cid



India Tour

with Dr. Bruce Kraig

Dear CHCers,

For those of you who have expressed interest in a food and culture tour of south India, here are potential dates and probable prices. I need to know what dates are best for you: Leave Chicago-Bombay Friday evening, Feb 28 or Leave Chicago-Bombay Friday evening March 7. Based on conversations with members, the March 7 date seems best.

The price is likely to be about \$2950 for 12-1/2 days or so on the ground. But there is a single supplement, unfortunately, of around \$500. We can try to negotiate that down but I can't be certain. So, it would be more cost effective for single travelers to double up. The hotels are all 5 star or close and the busses air conditioned.

Please let me know whether you plan to go as soon as possible so we can make arrangements. You can e-mail me directly at: bkraig@jps.net or Susan Ridgeway or reply to Catherine Lambrecht. A full, proposed, itinerary is posted on the website.

Thanks greatly and see you at the next meeting.

Bruce Kraig



Tres leches



Pan de los Muertos

WEBSITE

Part of the reason for having a Culinary Historians website, is to be able to cut some of our printing and postage expenses. By accessing the website and printing your own version of the newsletter and other notices that are now sent by snail mail, you can help conserve our financial resources. If this is something you'd like to participate in, please inform our envelope stuffer and mailer, extraordinaire, Cecile Margulies, to please remove your name from the newsletter mailing list.

Thank you.

SAVE THIS DATE

Mark your calendar to attend the upcoming Culinary Historians of Chicago meetings, held on the Saturdays listed below, at the Chicago Historical Society. Parking is available in a city lot across the street and north of the museum building. Dates are subject to change and notices will be sent prior to the meeting:

- December 14

Membership renewals are due. Annual dues are \$30 for individuals, \$40 for a couple and \$15 for students. Membership includes a membership card, newsletter, and notifications of meetings and special events. Also, discounts are offered to members at CHC-sponsored special events.

ANDREW F. SMITH JULY'S CHC SPEAKER CELEBRATES PEANUTS

How many misconceptions can there be about peanuts? For starters, they are not true nuts, but legumes, even though - as Smith points out in his book *Peanuts: The Illustrious History of the Goober Pea*, by Andrew F. Smith (University of Illinois Press, 2002)—in the culinary world they are regarded and utilized as nuts.

Peanut Butter's Mother

Next in the true-or-false lineup: George Washington Carver was the father of peanut butter. False. Although he is officially credited with inventing 300 uses for the peanut, from oil to milk to flour, peanut butter predates Carver's birth in 1865 by several decades. While no one knows exactly who invented the marvelous stuff, it was enthroned in the American appetite more than a century ago, and the earliest candidate was Rose Davis who lived in Allgerville, New York, in the 1840s. According to New York historian Eleanor Rosakranse, writes Smith, "Rose Davis's son, Ross, traveled to Cuba, where he saw women grind peanuts and smear the paste on bread. Ross told his mother about the practice, and she employed the peanut paste for making sandwiches. Another peanut butter story was told by the manufacturer G.W. Nash, who claimed that the first peanut butter 'was made in a New York City hospital by a physician and given to patients having digestive troubles. This was in 1870, and the butter was made by grinding the nuts in a mortar with a pestle.'" Lastly John Harvey Kellogg, health reformer and inventor of corn flakes, claimed that he invented nut butters in general, peanut butter (economical to make) in particular.

Raison de Research

Misconceptions, in general parlance, may be considered as harmless myths. However, when perpetuated in culinary history as fact, they present a more serious face. As Smith writes in his introduction, "If the field of culinary history is to thrive, it must promote higher evidentiary standards. Failure to do so will result in culinary history's relegation to the arena of fiction, myth, and trivia." Smith goes on to invite future culinary historians and writers "to revise, challenge, and improve the peanut story and the social history in which it is embedded." That being said, Smith's book, like his talk, however well documented, is never dull. His book tells the culinary history of the peanut in 11 chapters, and ends with 125 recipes for peanuts, some of which were prepared for CHC members and guests by Barbara Olson and Dawn McGlone, and styled and presented by Sher Blair.

Sweet Home Bolivia

Because the peanut had spread to the Caribbean, Africa, South America, Southeast Asia and Pacific islands by the time 16th-century European explorers found it, its origin was a botanical puzzle. But, according to Smith, and despite archaeological remains of peanuts in pre-Columbian tombs in Peru, "...the point of origin for the cultivated peanut was finally (in the 1960s) identified as eastern Bolivia." Whatever their birthplace, the cultivation and consumption of peanuts spread throughout the world. Smith writes, "The reasons for this amazing success were several. Peanuts were generally comparable with other plants in Asia and Africa. They were cultivated and consumed much like other legumes but could be grown in marginal soil that would not support other crops. Peanuts required little effort to cultivate and were easily harvested. The peanut plants were more prolific, and produced more fruit than did the alternatives. The peanut seeds were particularly rich in oil—a characteristic that proved crucial for its adoption outside of the

Americas. Perhaps the most important characteristic was the peanut's versatility. Peanuts could be consumed in thousands of ways—ways that would easily fit in with the culinary traditions of many different cultures."

Liver with Peanuts

Not to quibble with Smith's assertion about peanuts' culinary versatility, but among the recipes at the back of Smith's book is one attributed to George Washington Carver: Liver with Peanuts. "Boil the liver from two fowls or a turkey; when tender mash them fine; boil one pint of blanched peanuts until soft; mash them to a smooth paste; mix and rub through a purée-strainer; season to taste with salt, pepper, and lemon juice; moisten with melted butter; spread paste on bread like sandwiches, or add enough hot chicken stock to make a purée; heat again and season with salt, pepper, and lemon juice."

Fortunately for the adventuresome cook, there are dozens more appealing: Peanut Omelet, Peanut Hash, Macaroni and Peanuts, Mashed Potatoes with Peanut Butter, Chocolate Nut Pudding, Cream of Peanut Soup, Delicious Oatmeal Drop Cakes or Hermits, Peanut Cookies and Peanut Nougat.

The following recipe (p. 153) recommends itself to the upcoming holiday season and is made especially easy because today's peanuts come already shelled.

Peanut Pralines (Pistaches Pralinees)

1 Pound of Peanuts
1 Pound of Brown Sugar
4 Tablespoonfuls of Water
1 Tablespoonful of Butter

Shell the peanuts and break into bits. Then set the sugar and water to boil, and as it begins to simmer add the peanuts and the butter. Stir constantly and as it bubbles up at once take from the fire, pour from the spoon onto the marble slab or a buttered plate, and set away to harden.

Source: *The Picayune Creole Cook Book*, 2d ed. (New Orleans: The Picayune, 1901), 376.

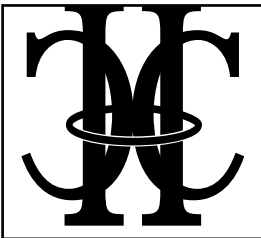
Andrew F. Smith, president of the American Forum for Global Education in New York City, teaches culinary history at the New School University. He is the author of numerous books, many about food, including *The Tomato in America*, *Pure Ketchup*, *Popped Culture* (about popcorn). His next book will be about turkey.

CHC president Bruce Kraig (left) with July's speaker, Andrew F. Smith; Smith's topic, *Peanuts: The Illustrious History of the Goober Pea*, was excerpted from his book by that name. (Photo by Sher Blair)



ABOUT CHC

- Founded in 1993 as a non-profit educational organization committed to the study of the history of food and drink in human cultures.
- Members include: everyday cooks, amateur historians, food professionals and those in academia. Our common denominator is that all are food enthusiasts.
- The CHC blend the academic with the popular in presentations to members and the public in many venues including seminars, conferences, publications and other media.
- Meetings are held monthly at the Chicago Historical Society. Programs range from ethnic food traditions, food history, and talks given by experts in a variety of fields.
- For membership information contact:
Susan Ridgeway
2113 Sanborn Circle, Plainfield, IL 60544
Phone: 815-439-3960; Fax: 815-254-9483
email: saridgeway0622@yahoo.com
Or visit the website, www.culinaryhistorians.org



Bruce Kraig, PhD, President
Don Newcomb, Vice President
Scott Warner, Program Chairman
Susan Ridgeway, Treasurer
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Catherine Lambrecht, Web Secretary
Amy Ridgeway, events and brochures
Nancy & John Ryan, Newsletter
Wanda Bain, Marketing and Publicity
Sher Blair, Joan Wainovich, Food Styling
Barbara Olson, Dawn McGlone, Catering

The CHC is co-sponsored by the Chicago Historical Society.

Upcoming ChicaGourmet Events

ChicaGourmets!
and
Michael Foley, Chef-owner, Printer's Row
invite you to
Christmas with Pinots

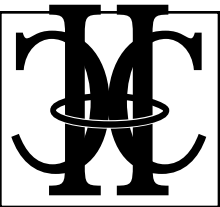
6:30 P.M., Tuesday, December 3, 2002
PRINTER'S ROW

550 South Dearborn, Chicago
Contact Don Newcomb, Tel: 708-383-7543
E-mail: donaldnewcomb@attbi.com Fax: 708-383-4964
\$69 Member, \$79 Nonmember

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ChicaGourmets!
and
Belloc Lowndes Gallery
215 West Huron, Chicago
Invite you to
Spend an Evening with Award-Winning
Artist, Jamey Rouch
December 10, 2002, 6-8:30 P.M.
\$15

Chef, author and entrepreneur Wilbert Jones will provide gourmet hors d'oeuvres and wonderful wines for this special open house. Toast the holidays, enjoy Chef Wilbert's food delights, chat with guest artist Jamey Rouch and gallery owners Portia and Charles Belloc Lowndes and Algernon Williams. You'll also have the opportunity to do some special holiday shopping from an array of one of a kind works of art! 'Tis the Season!



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