

## Tasting Home: Filipino Adobo

Ging Gutierrez Steinberg

**B**EFORE I LEFT MY HOME in Manila to live in Hong Kong many years ago, I made a special point of learning to cook one recipe—my mother's *adobo*. Today this dish is still special to me in my American home. It is the first thing on my to-cook list when my American husband is out of town, because the smell of the odorous fermented fish paste (*bagoong*) that I like to eat with it makes him ill. It is the dish I often cook to show American friends or family what a typical Filipino dish is. And it is what I'm likely to cook when Filipino friends come to visit, because we have unofficially anointed it as our national dish. In fact, it has acquired iconic status for members

of the Filipino diaspora.

How can a country with over 7,000 islands, 17 regions, 79 provinces, and more than 111 spoken languages have a national dish? Why are Filipinos so staunchly united in their devotion to this very simple stew—essentially, pork or chicken (sometimes both) cooked in a mixture of vinegar and soy sauce with smashed garlic, crushed peppercorns, and bay leaves? There are countless variations both regional and personal, but what links them is the sharp-smelling vinegar-soy base.

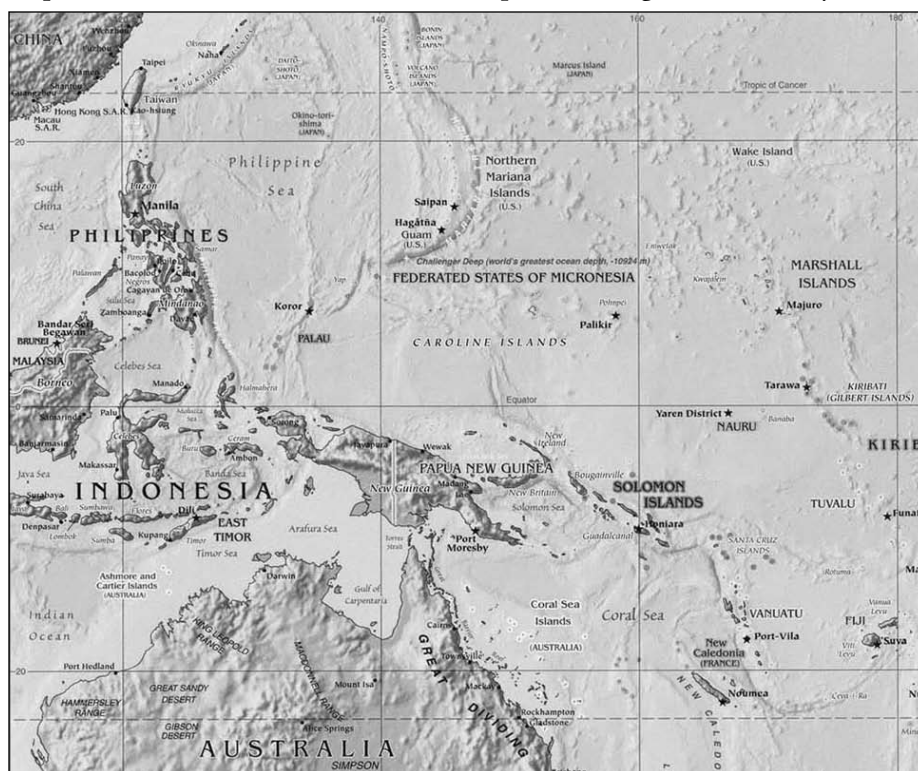
There is debate about the origins of the dish. Many Filipinos believe that adobo comes from Spain, owing to the 333 years of

Spanish colonial rule (1565–1898). But adobo in Spanish cuisine is an oil and vinegar-based marinade or pickling sauce. (The name comes from the Old French *adober*, the word for outfitting a knight in armor.) Some claim that during the days of the Manila-Acapulco galleons the dish was adopted from Mexico, where *adobos* came to mean ground seasoning pastes usually involving dried red chiles, garlic, and vinegar or another acid ingredient. They can be marinades for different foods, or directly used as a sauce base. Dishes made with Mexican adobo mixtures can be called *adobos* or described as *en adobo* or *adobado* (“adobo-ized”).

Perhaps Filipino adobos descend from those of Spain or Mexico. But during the colonial era the native peoples apparently began using local ingredients to achieve a pucker-inducing kind of sourness and saltiness that Filipinos love. Early accounts suggest that today's Filipino flavor principles were already developed or developing in pre-colonial times. Antonio Pigafetta, who sailed on Magellan's 1521 voyage, reported that native Filipino food was “very salty”; Spanish friars also described it as salty and acidic.

The modern Filipino's deep attachment to adobo reflects this preference together with a significant olfactory appeal. The smell of adobo cooking may not be attractive to non-Filipinos, but for us the pungency

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## CHNY Newsletter

Editor: Helen Brody

Lead Text Editor:

Anne Mendelson

Please send/e-mail member news, book reviews, events calendars to:

Helen Brody

PO Box 923

Grantham, NH 03753

[helen@helenbrody.com](mailto:helen@helenbrody.com)

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Papers demonstrating serious culinary history research will be considered for inclusion in issues of the CHNY newsletters. Please contact Helen Brody, newsletter editor. Matriculating students of culinary history or related topics are invited to contribute.

# FROM THE CHAIR

**T**HIS SPRING the Culinary Historians of New York reaches beyond its monthly programming and semiannual newsletter to touch the wider world of culinary history by announcing its second Amelia Award and calling for applications for its second Amelia Scholar's Grant.

Barbara Ketcham Wheaton has been selected as the recipient of CHNY's second Amelia Award, celebrating distinguished achievement in culinary history. Some of you will recall that Wheaton spoke in January 1986 to the newly-formed Culinary Historians of New York on her ground-breaking book, *Savoring the Past: The French Kitchen from 1300-1789* (1983). *Savoring the Past* remains the gold standard for studies of the emergence of modern French cuisine from the *service en confusion* (Wheaton's wickedly funny but accurate assessment) of medieval cookery.

In addition to other writings and teaching future generations how to read cookbooks as historical documents, Wheaton has been heavily involved in preserving our culinary past, nurturing our present, and projecting our future. She is the honorary curator of the culinary collection at Radcliffe's Schlesinger Library, is a Trustee of the Oxford Symposium on Food & Cookery, and has been a consultant to Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Counter Intelligence Lab. The award ceremony will likely take place in late September, as part of CHNY's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, so be on the lookout for the invitation.

We are also soliciting applications for the second Amelia Scholar's Grant—see article at right.

CHNY is transitioning into an (almost) paperless organization by encouraging all of our members with e-mail access to receive program notices electronically. With a mailing list of nearly 400, e-mail is cost effective, environmentally gentle, and cuts down on the tedious photocopying, envelope sticking, sealing, and mailing required of the CHNY volunteers every month. As an added benefit, e-mail also allows us to contact members quickly in the event there is a change in programming, such as cancellation due to inclement weather or other unforeseen circumstance.

For those unsure whether we have a current e-mail address for you, or to change your e-mail address, please e-mail information to [culinaryhistoriansny@verizon.net](mailto:culinaryhistoriansny@verizon.net). In the SUBJECT line please type "e-mail update." For those without e-mail access, you can still receive notices by regular mail by opting into our "snail mail" delivery system. Please fill out the form on page 9 of this newsletter and send it to Culinary Historians of New York, P.O. Box 3289, New York, New York 10163, attention: Kara Newman (if you haven't already done so), with your name and mailing address to continue receiving mailed announcements of programs.

CHNY is not losing its addiction to paper entirely. Under Helen Brody's stewardship, CHNY will continue to publish in hard copy its semiannual newsletter. We have instituted a reviewing board to vet articles before publication to ensure the highest scholarship, and my thanks to those who have volunteered their expertise.

Finally, the legal reorganization of Culinary Historians of New York is complete. In late February, the Internal Revenue Service granted tax-exempt status to the newly formed Culinary Historians of New York, Inc. The corporation now enjoys all of the benefits associated with its nonprofit educational status while protecting its members in the event of legal claims against the

organization. Our deepest thanks to the law firm of Patterson, Belknap, Webb & Tyler, LLP, and especially Antonia Grumback, Esq. and Derek Dorn, Esq., for their tireless *pro bono* representation of CHNY, Inc. in this important matter.



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## Letters to the Editor

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### To the Editor:

Tae Ellin's article "Where the Buffalo Roam... Again" in the fall 2005 CHNY newsletter is a delightful and welcome treatment of an important subject. But I'd like to call attention to a couple of statements that perhaps could use some qualifying.

As Ms. Ellin notes, American bison long ago split into two populations generally called the "plains buffalo" and the "wood buffalo" (or bison). I do not think that today most naturalists would classify them as two separate species or use the zoological names *Bison bison* and *Bison athabascae*. They are generally recognized as subspecies within the species *Bison bison* and most often identified as *Bison bison bison* (plains bison) and *Bison bison athabascae* (wood bison). It is not true that wood bison are extinct and only plains bison remain. Wood bison may no longer exist in the United States, but the subspecies still survives in Canada, especially the province of Alberta. See the report "Status of the Wood Bison (*Bison bison athabascae*) in Alberta" by Jonathan A. Mitchell and C. Cormack Gates, <[www.3.gov.ab.ca/srd/fw/status/reports/bison](http://www.3.gov.ab.ca/srd/fw/status/reports/bison)>.

I'm also concerned that the paragraph beginning "The health

benefits of bison are unquestionable" may give an oversimplified picture of bison meat's nutritional merits. Most nutritionists are leery of numbers games that treat the comparative "health benefits" of different foods as matters of simple more-and-less statistics. The figures given in the article (2.42 grams of fat, 143 calories in a 100-gram serving) are those that appear in literature of the National Bison Association and other industry groups with a product to promote; probably they go back to tables in a 1989 U.S.D.A. handbook (Agriculture Handbook No. 8-17). No mention is made of what cut of meat might have been analyzed; we all know that different cuts of beef or parts of a chicken have different compositions, and the same is true for bison. What's perhaps even more important is that listing the relative tallies of calories and fat for different foods is an extremely superficial, often misleading way of gauging overall health benefits. It's certainly accurate and helpful to point out that bison is a very lean meat compared to beef. I would, however, mistrust industry handouts as a source of more specific information

Anne Mendelson

FEBRUARY, 2006

## CALL FOR ENTRIES

# The Amelia Scholar's Grant

Awarded by Culinary  
Historians of New York

CULINARY HISTORIANS of New York announces the call for entries for the second annual Amelia Scholar's Grant. Named after Amelia Simmons, the author of *American Cookery*, the first cookbook written in America, the Amelia Scholar's Grant is designed to promote research and scholarship in the field of culinary history. The Amelia Scholar's Grant is intended to fund one student or scholar whose engaging, well-developed project demonstrates commitment to the field of culinary history.

One grant of \$1,000 will be awarded to help support ongoing scholarship for research, books, papers, articles, conferences, or related projects. Further details and application requirements are available on the Culinary Historians of New York's web site, [www.culinaryhistoriansny.org](http://www.culinaryhistoriansny.org).

Applications shall include an essay (no more than 500 words) detailing the project for which the Amelia Scholar's Grant is sought and one letter of recommendation. Completed applications must be postmarked no later than April 30, 2006. It is anticipated that the recipient will be announced in June 2006. The winner will be the featured speaker at a Culinary Historians of New York meeting during the 2007-08 season to share the fruits of the funded research.

# The Red Michelin: Then and Now

by Helen Studley

IN NOVEMBER 2005 Michelin made its much anticipated New York debut with the release of the *Michelin Guide® New York City 2006* (Michelin Travel Publications, Greenville, SC.). As it was Michelin's first guide in North America, expectations were high. Who would be the illustrious few to receive three-star billing? What chef would be catapulted to sudden fame? What restaurant would tumble?

The Michelin people held a coming out party attended by members of the press, French dignitaries, and a roster of popular chefs and restaurateurs. Of the 500 restaurants and 50 hotels rated, Alain Ducasse, Jean Georges, Le Bernadin, and Per Se entered Michelin's hall of fame three-star status. Bouley, Daniel, Danube, and Masa came in with two stars. There were 31 one-star nominations. No Chinese, Mexican, Greek, Spanish, Thai, or Vietnamese received a star, which unleashed considerable public criticism. The press ridiculed the guide's clumsy English and complained about the poor quality of the pictures. Many dismissed the Guide and returned to the *Zagat Survey* which, despite some flaws, is more in tune with the New York public.

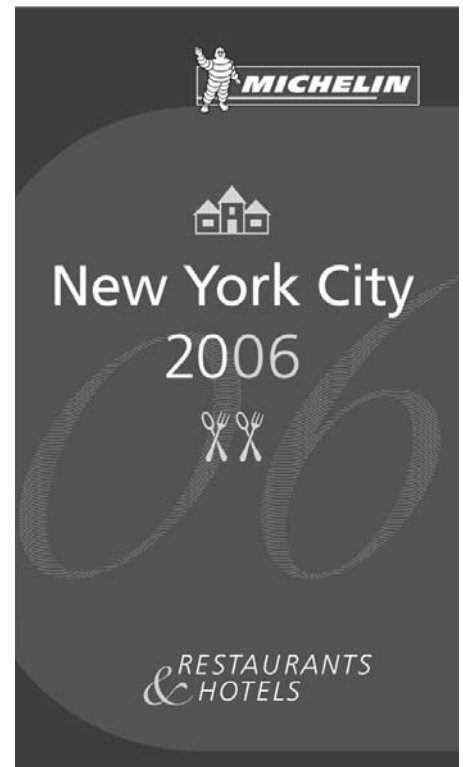
What, people wondered, had prompted Michelin to take on New York? Some suggested that the guide's prestige had suffered and needed a boost. A former inspector's tell-all book had appeared in 2004 saying that Michelin had become lax in its standards. Others mentioned that since the Michelin Guide is published by a French company, the rating system is biased toward French cuisine in a global economy.

The first Michelin Guide was published in 1900 by André Michelin to help wealthy gastronomes find decent lodgings and food while traveling by the new medium of the motor car. The Guide included addresses for gasoline stations, garages, tire stock lists, and public toilets. Until 1920 it was free.

In 1926, the Guide introduced the star system to note "good places to stop;" two and three stars were added in the early 1930s. The mysterious Michelin inspectors emerged in 1933, visiting anonymously and frequently dining alone.

The format utilized an extensive system of symbols to describe each establishment as briefly and accurately as possible. There were five levels to show good service, indicated by crossed spoons and forks. Anything in red spelled super luxury. A little bird in a rocking chair signaled a quiet or secluded spot. To interpret these symbols became a sport with tourists who flocked in ever greater numbers to France.

The Guide's finest hour, however, had nothing to do with stars or crossed spoons. In the spring of 1944, as the great armada was preparing for its landing on the coast of Normandy, the Allied Chiefs of Staff realized that progress through France would be hampered because road signs had all been either destroyed or removed by the Germans. After considerable research, and with the permission of Michelin, the Allies decided to reproduce the last edition of the Guide—dated 1939—which contained hundreds of detailed, up-to-date town and city maps. Reproduced in Washington,



it was distributed to officers with the cover stamped: "For official use only."

The Michelin Guide resumed publication after the war. As tourism gained renewed momentum, Michelin introduced guides to Benelux, Italy, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, Great Britain & Ireland, and the "Main Cities of Europe."

New York City, it turns out, was only the first step for Michelin to enter the U.S. market. There are plans to produce a "red guide" to San Francisco.

*Helen Studley, a food and travel writer, is the author of The Chicken For Every Occasion Cookbook and The Life of a Restaurant: Tales and Recipes of La Colombe d'Or, the former restaurant she and her husband owned for twenty-three years.*

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# Program Summaries

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## SOME LIKE IT HOT: A HISTORY OF THE WORLD'S HOTTEST CUISINES

Presented by Clifford Wright  
October 27, 2005

On a breezy fall evening at the Park Avenue United Methodist Church Clifford Wright, author of the recently published book, *Some Like it Hot: Spicy Favorites from the World's Hot Zones* (Boston: Harvard Common Press, 2005), spoke about the fiery cuisines of the world.

The focus of the program was his research into why some groups of people like hot food. He reviewed and dismissed fourteen different common and not so common hypotheses, concluding with the simplest one that says people prefer the way they taste. He identified the fourteen centers of spicy food culture as Western South America, primarily Peru and Bolivia; Mexico and Southwestern U.S.; Cajun Cuisine; Jamaica; Western coast of Africa, primarily Senegal, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, and Nigeria; North Africa of Algeria and Tunisia; Eastern Africa, especially Ethiopia; Yemen; India; Pakistan; Thailand; Sichuan and Hunan provinces in China; and Korea.

Wright spoke of how chili pepper migrated from its home in South America to other countries around the world and, although early on it was not one of the most sought after spices like black pepper or cinnamon, once the New World was discovered it replaced black pepper as the hottest spice due in large part to the fact that it was stronger in taste, cheaper to grow, and adaptable to different climates.

Members and guests tasted recipes made from *Some Like It Hot*

such as Manchamantel (Tablecloth Stainer) from Oaxaca and Eggplant Curry from India with pita bread and green mangoes strips with a piquant Tai spice mixture. A collection of fresh and dried chili peppers were also on display with explicit instructions not to touch or inhale because chilies can burn three times—taste, touch, and smell.

—Ammini Ramachandran

## DINING WITH THE GODS

Presented by Andrew Dalby  
December 5, 2005

Sotheby Institute of Art's exhibit of ancient Greek dining vessels was the perfect venue for "Dining With the Gods," a lecture on ancient food rituals by Andrew Dalby.

Dalby, a trained classicist and linguist, is the author of many books on ancient culinary history. He engaged the audience in a scholarly discussion of ancient Greece and the relationships between gods and humans. What part of an animal was offered up to the gods hinted at the complex human issue of how the ancients could pay due homage and sacrifice without wasting perfectly good food. The stories that have been passed down through time tell that humans and gods socialized together on earth.

As an example, if a question arose as to what parts of a roast oxen should be offered to the gods and which part to the humans, the choice would be made eventually by the gods. Prometheus, who had an affinity toward the humans, decided that he would help them get some of the choicer meats by wrapping the thigh bones with lush fat, making for some

delectable appearing treats. He then placed them next to some choice cuts that he cleverly covered with some less attractive viscera. Prometheus then declared that the gods themselves should decide which cuts they would receive. Naturally they chose the more attractive "lard-on-a-stick." Humans were then free to eat the choice parts of the slaughtered animal without feeling less devout.

Drawing on his skills as a linguist, Dalby discussed the roots of the word "toasting" as in lifting a glass of wine to your host. In past history, a single person doing the toasting might actually share or give the cup to the "toastee." To not accept the cup, or the gesture, was to offend. In a group, however, toasting developed into a more ritual raising of the glass in a gesture of giving the cup.

Immediately following the lecture the audience delighted in period food prepared by CHNY chair Cathy Kaufman and based on recipes from her forthcoming book, *Cooking in the Ancient World*. The tasting included an olive relish, *must* biscuits, honey roasted pork, pomegranate-walnut chicken turnovers, fried dates in honey, and mini-cheesecakes. Spiced wine sweetened with honey was served as an accompaniment.

—David Araki

## GASTRONOMY AND GLUTTONY IN EARLY MODERN CHINA

Presented by Joanna Waley-Cohen  
January 31, 2006

In her talk, timed to coincide with the Chinese New Year, Joanna Waley-Cohen, Professor of History at New York University, with a focus on Chinese military history, left the battlefields behind to explore the in-

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## Program Summaries

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tersection of aesthetic and gustatory taste in China.

While the Chinese have no word for “sinful,” as in “sinful chocolate cake,” the Chinese never looked favorably upon gluttony. It served as a metaphor for political corruption and moral turpitude. Wise and good rulers made sure that their subjects had enough to eat, and conducted their own lives and government with frugality, moderation, and balance. Learned people cultivated not only their minds but also their bodies, since both were viewed as interconnected. Bad people were often said to have gluttony among their failings.

Gastronomy, on the other hand, ranked among the arts of the cultivated gentleman, along with knowledge of painting and poetry. In the three major periods that Waley-Cohen examined—the late Song of the thirteenth century, the late Ming of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, and the Manchu Qing dynasty of the late eighteenth century—an interest in gastronomy was linked with a rise in consumerism. In each of these diverse time periods, an increased number of people had money to spend on fine foods, locally grown or produced elsewhere in China. Gustatory taste, especially in the late Ming, became commodified, like everything else, but also reflected, despite its focus on pleasure, the mark of a knowledgeable man. Authors, painters, and poets represented the epicurean life in their works (e.g., lavish descriptions of feasting on river crabs and the proper way to make snow orchid tea), and their works, in turn, reveal the complex aesthetics of taste in China, which encompass satisfying the palate and obeying the principles of balanced nutrition.

—Diana Pittet

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# Member Profile

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## WILLIAM WOYS WEAVER

by Helen Brody

**A**N OFFICE for most of us consists of a telephone, a desk, and a computer. For William Woys Weaver, his office also includes the 21 raised beds of a kitchen garden near his 1805 tavern named Roughwood. “These are not the carefully manicured grounds intended for a garden tour,” he warns those who might be considering a casual walk through. “They are my private laboratory of plants in different stages of growth, many even drying up and going to seed, not always beautiful, I assure you.” And no wonder he harbors a sense of protection. These plants are the source of a 4,000 heirloom seed vegetable, herb, and fruit collection—a repository that is drawn on by growers all over the world.

Unlike Will’s heirloom seeds, the seeds sold today by many corporations can not reproduce true plants, meaning farmers cannot save and replant their seeds. Known as F1 hybrids, these seeds produce many of the country’s major crops, and to continue in business, the farmers are forced to buy new and costly seed (from the company) each year. Another major downside to F1 hybrids, such as wheat, corn, or soy, is that they are bred to respond to particular pesticides and fertilizers. If a virus that the plant is designed to resist mutates, a large percentage of the nation’s crop could be lost and the hybrid becomes worthless, causing food shortages. Such was the case with corn back in the 1970s. “In a sense,” Will says, “monoculture hybrids are like one shoe to fit all feet regardless of the soils, microclimate, etc.” In other words, you can plant

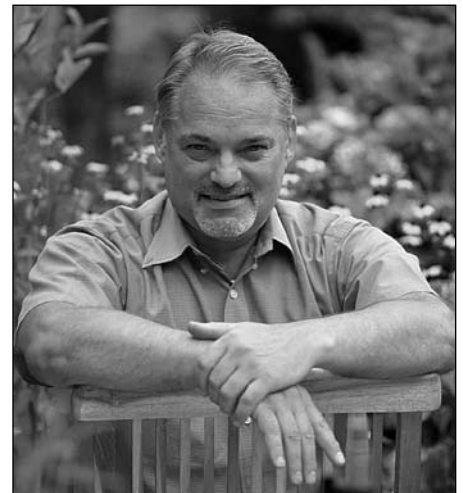


Photo: Rob Cardillo

the seeds once and that would be it for that product. What would appear next is anybody’s guess and if you did plant it, you might be sued for patent infringement.

Enter the heirloom seed movement which developed in response to this monoculture hybrid situation. Unlike the corporate F1 hybrids, heirloom hybrids are fixed in their traits, resist mutation, and will reproduce true plants, and their seeds can be saved for replanting. Will’s Roughwood Seed Collection assures an established library of material to draw on. Furthermore, these heirloom treasures offer a variety of type and flavor that corporate hybrids cannot match.

But Will’s interests and involvements go far beyond the preservation and selling of seeds. As a food historian who has traveled the world tracking the origins of vegetables, herbs, and fruits, he has discovered a vast array of foods that are no longer part of our diet and is always on the trail of some form of plant life that he has seen mentioned in an historical text. Two of his oldest varieties in continuous cultivation are the Cypriot bottle gourd, datable to about 2,500 b.c. and the Perivan *yacon*, datable to

at least 500 A.D. Currently he is in pursuit of the name of the person who developed the Atlantic Prize tomato which began being marketed in 1889 in Atlantic County, New Jersey. "It was the hottest tomato on the market," he says.

Of his 12 books, three have received International Association of Culinary Professional (IACP)'s Jane Grigson award for scholarship. He is professor of Food Studies at Drexel University, writes feature articles for *Mother Earth News*, and is a contributing editor to *Gourmet* magazine, for whom he has recently completed

an article on chef Alain Passard who startled the gastronomic world by changing his menu to include essentially only vegetables. To complete his resume, Will is working on a doctorate at the University College Dublin dealing with the "authenticity" of the tourism food experience—what foods the tourist expects from his local visit versus what the local residents actually eat at home.

*Helen Brody* is CHNY newsletter editor and the author/researcher of several books including most recently *New Hampshire: From Farm to Kitchen* (Hippocrene Books, NY).

Guidelines, and a comprehensive nutrition dictionary.

Broadway Books, a division of Random House, Inc, New York, will publish *The Murray's Cheese Handbook* by **Rob Kaufelt** this September.

To be published this month is *Tea In the City: New York* (Benjamin Press, Perryville, KY) "a guide to all things tea-related in Manhattan and the boroughs" and written by **Elizabeth Knight**, tea sommelier for the historic St. Regis Hotel. It features scores of colorful photos by Bruce Richardson.

**Alexandra Leaf** continues her work in chocolate, leading walking tours to the city's better chocolate shops and conducting tasting classes for the Institute of Culinary Education and the 92nd St. Y. She is the principal organizer of the 92nd St. Y's Annual World Chocolate Tasting  
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## Member News

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**Elizabeth Andoh** is an IACP and James Beard award finalist for her book *Washoku: Recipes from the Japanese Home Kitchen* (Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, CA).

**Rynn Berry**, expert on the history of vegetarianism, has just completed seven entries for the *Oxford Companion to Food and Drink in America* to be published in 2007 and edited by member **Andrew F. Smith**. Rynn has just released the twelfth edition of *The Vegan Guide to New York City*.

The second and revised edition of *Taste of Malta* by **Claudia M. Cauana** was released in June, 2005, by Hippocrene Books, New York.

In her recently published book, *The Sex Life of Food* (St. Martin's Press, New York, 2006), **Bunny Crumacker** describes how food affects every aspect of our lives, sex, table manners, religion, digestion, soup to nuts. Crumacker is also the author of *The Old-Time Brand-Name Cook Book* and *Old-Time Brand-Name Desserts*.

**Betty Fussell** appeared on a panel at NYU's Fales Library March 10 to discuss "Food Writers of Greenwich Village." Members of CHNY are welcomed at the Fales' Critical Topics series. Upcoming is "Women Who Cook for a Living in New York and Why There Aren't More of Them" on June 15, and "From There to Here: the Chains and Systems of Food" on October 19. Fussell also appeared March 31 on a panel at the IACP's convention in Seattle to discuss forms of food writing "Beyond Cookbooks."

**Ann Heslin, MA, RD, CDN** along with Annette B. Natow, PhD and Karen J. Nolan, PhD announce the January 2006 release of the *The Most Complete Food Counter, 2nd Ed.*, a Pocket Books trade paperback. The book provides readers with an all-in-one nutrition reference providing: calories and nutrient values for over 21,000 foods, nutrition basics to understand the function and need for each nutrient counted, action points for following the latest Dietary

### IN MEMORY

**Cecily Brownstone**, a long-time member of the Culinary Historians of New York, died in August at the age of 96. For 39 years as the Associated Press Food Editor, Cecily was one of the most widely distributed journalists in the world, writing five recipe columns and two features a week.

Her collection of more than 8,000 cookbooks, 5,000 cookery pamphlets, and personal letters are now part of the Fales Collection of New York University. Donations in her memory may be mailed to: Marvin Taylor, Director, Fales Library, NYU, 70 Washington Square South, New York, NY 10012.

—Christine Pines

## Member News

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Event which took place in March. Active with Les Dames D'Escoffier, she hosted an evening with anthropologist Naomi Duguid to which CHNY members were invited. In April, she will host an evening at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond in conjunction with their upcoming FEAST show and in May, she will give a talk for the Beaux Arts Alliance entitled "What Monet Ate and How Toulouse Lautrec Drank: The Art of the Table in Impressionist France."

**David Leite** is a finalist in both the essay and internet categories of the IACP's Bert Greene Food Journalism award, and received a nomination in a new James Beard Foundation category—"best internet website for food."

Susan McLellan Plaisted MS, RD, CSP, LDN had her careers as a reg-

istered dietitian and food historian merge in *Today's Dietitian* December 2005 with an article titled "Culinary History and Preservation-Savoring Tradition."

**Andrew F. Smith** has completed a book, *Real American Food: A Culinary Tour of America*, coauthored with Burt Wolf. It is a tour of ten American cities with an examination of their culinary heritage. It is scheduled for publication by Rizzoli in early June. He is also teaching classes in Advanced Culinary History and Professional Food Writing at the New School.

**Susan Yager's** article, "Incredible Edible East End Eggs," concerning the social, ethical, and environmental benefits of eggs harvested from humanely and sustainably raised poultry, and the handful of farmers still raising chickens in this way on Long Island, will be featured in the spring edition of *Edible East End* magazine.

## Help Save Marcus Apicius!

**M**OST CULINARY historians know about the cookery manuscript attributed to Marcus Apicius, the first century Roman gourmand. Containing 500 recipes, the manuscript was assembled and hand copied in the fourth century. In the ninth century, monks at the Fulda monastery in Germany recopied the recipes in a simple manuscript adorned by red letters. This ninth century manuscript has amazingly survived through twelve hundred years of wars and natural disasters and is believed to be the earliest copy of Apicius, the only recipe collection we have from the ancient Mediterranean.

During the Reformation, the manuscript was shipped to the Vatican Library, which also owned another, slightly later, set of Apicius's recipes. The Vatican sold the Fulda manuscript to a private collector. The manuscript was sold at auction and eventually was given to the New York Academy of Medicine. The manuscript has been used by numerous scholars, two of whom—Sally Grainger and Dr. Christopher Grocock—gave a presentation to the Culinary Historians of New York last year based on their forthcoming re-translation of the manuscript.

The 1,200 year-old manuscript is falling apart and needs to be rebound. The New York Academy of Medicine approached a professional manuscript restorer; the estimated cost of rebinding is \$15,000. In cooperation with the Culinary Trust of the International Association of Culinary Professionals, Culinary Historians of New York asks its members to help save our culinary

### Call for Authors for New Book Project

**G**REENWOOD Publishing Group is seeking authors to contribute entries for a new project on dining/entertaining through history. It will be a three volume set arranged A-Z, with entries covering cultures (Italian, Muslim, Japanese, etc), time periods (Ancient Rome, the Renaissance, 19th Century, etc), objects (chopsticks, forks, finger bowls), holidays and festivals, relating to the history of dining/entertaining.

The goal of this set is to identify for readers the entertaining practices and traditions of various cultures throughout history, at festivals as well as family events. It has an anthropological perspective explaining the links between a culture's political, economic, religious and/or social circumstances and its methods of dining/entertaining. While the entries will not contain recipes, foods and dishes should be mentioned where appropriate.

Contributors will receive writing credit and mention with bio in the encyclopedia, but will not be paid.

If you are interested in contributing, please contact Francine Segan at [Fsegan@verizon.net](mailto:Fsegan@verizon.net) for more information. Entries must be in by October 1, 2006.

heritage by donating to the Apicius and similar restoration projects through Culinary Historians of New York. All funds collected will go directly to restoration projects; all those who contribute will be invited to the Apicius restoration celebration, likely in the Fall of 2006. Please send contributions marked "culinary heritage restoration" to:

Culinary Historians of  
New York, Inc.  
P.O.Box 3289  
New York, NY 10163

Cathy Kaufman, CHNY  
Andy Smith, CHNY and  
IACP Culinary Trust

## **NYU and Beard Foundation Host International Conference**

**F**ROM MAY 21 to 26, 2006, the James Beard Foundation and New York University's Steinhardt School of Education are co-hosting a joint international conference titled "The Mediterranean Diet: Fact & Fiction." The program, conducted in English, will assemble Italian and American experts on subjects such as nutrition, culture, lifestyle behaviors, artisanal and commercial food production, and government regulation to discuss the concept of the Mediterranean diet using Italy as a case study. Topics will include how has the Mediterranean diet has been (mis)understood and what changes have gone on in Italian food

culture since the initial studies were conducted. Among other program highlights will be samplings of local food and an informal conversation with Frances Mayes, author of the best-selling *Under the Tuscan Sun*.

Held at NYU's spectacular 57-acre Villa la Pietra, the conference will afford participants—food enthusiasts, academics, nutritionists, and others—an immersion in Italian food culture. Tours of the villa, as well as optional field trips to other points of interest in the Tuscan countryside.

Registration forms, hotel information, and the conference program, are available at <http://education.nyu.edu/conference/tuscandiet/>.

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## **Attention! Important Changes!**

We are moving over to the electronic age and in April will be sending program announcements by e-mail only unless you fill out the form below. We anticipate sending an initial notice approximately four weeks before a program, plus a reminder one week before the program.

**Please update our records by sending your correct e-mail address  
to [CulinaryHistoriansNY@verizon.net](mailto:CulinaryHistoriansNY@verizon.net)  
In the SUBJECT line type "e-mail update"**

FOR THOSE WITHOUT INTERNET ACCESS *you must respond with the form below.*

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Mail paper announcements to:

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Please return to CHNY, P.O. Box 3289, New York, NY 10163  
Attn: Kara Newman

## Adobo

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of the combined vinegar, soy, and crushed garlic is instantly recognizable—something that people take for granted growing up but that is transformed into the smell of home when one has left. An Internet blogger who calls himself “The Wily Filipino” muses:

“Anthropologists have always prioritized only two or three of the human senses... and the sense of smell always ends up taking a back seat. But smell is crucial to adobo—the sting of vinegar in the nostrils the minute after you pour it into the simmering pot, the deep smell of chicken cooking after the second hour—it’s instantly recognizable anywhere.”

Although adobo is now eaten by Filipinos of all classes, apparently this wasn’t always the case. Historians note that in early colonial times it used a lot of lard and was typically made up in large quantities and stored in the same clay vessels in which it had been cooked; the vinegar and lard acted as preservatives. As the Filipina novelist and essayist Gilda Cordero-Fernando points out in her book *Philippine Food and Life*, such large-scale provisioning “implied a surplus,” a sign of privilege. Adobo was not everyday fare for the *Indios* (natives), but something that the colonists and *principalia* (wealthy remnants of a pre-Hispanic native aristocracy) could keep for long periods of time against the visits of priests or local dignitaries.

But somehow adobo ceased to be the food of the conquerors. As I see it, it was a dish intrinsically suited to the natives’ sour-and-salty taste preferences. First it became a dish served to the peasantry on special occasions like fiestas while the gentry

feasted on more elegant offerings. Over time, people adapted it to local ingredients (palm or sugarcane vinegar instead of Spanish wine vinegar) and began making it with the soy sauce brought by Chinese immigrants (instead of salt). During the American occupation (1898–1946) following the 1896 revolution against Spain, adobo became typical everyday fare for an emerging Filipino middle class. It was during this period that Filipino cookbooks first were published, and they show home-cooked adobo holding its own despite the powerful influence of American-style convenience foods.

The 1960s saw the dramatic rise of a local restaurant culture fueled by increasing industrialization and urbanization, with migrants from the provinces trying their luck in the big cities. These changes helped push adobo to the forefront of a growing popular or street-food scene as a standby of the *carinderias* (open-air food stalls with cheap but filling fare). But at the same time they helped bring the dish to other kinds of eating places, especially a new breed of avowedly Filipino restaurants that made a point of serving dishes associated with traditional home kitchens—in contrast to the days when adobo was usually the one token “native” dish served in the more respectable urban restaurants. By now Filipinos as a group had begun identifying adobo as their national dish.

As adobo moved across class lines over the centuries, it also acquired a huge number of variations that make the whole meaning of “adobo” confusing for non-Filipinos but that have helped it to transcend not only class-linked but regional identities and to become a badge of national identity as universal as Yankee Doodle Dandy. Here is another secret of the dish’s

appeal: the ease with which you can produce your own version. It is the simplest thing to make because you literally throw everything in the pot and wait while it stews and the sauce reduces. The ingredients are few, inexpensive, readily available—and incredibly flexible. Its very simplicity has made it easy for Filipinos to apply their own variations over time. In different islands and provinces, people simply added to the basic recipe whatever was locally thriving, available, or specially liked, whether it was coconuts from the plantations or snipe and frogs to replace Spanish pork and chicken. As Corazon S. Alvina writes in an important contribution to the cookbook *The Food of the Philippines*, “Every province boasts of having the best version of adobo. Manila’s is soupy with soy sauce and garlic. Cavite cooks mash pork liver into the sauce. Batangas adds the orange hue of annatto, Laguna likes hers yellowish and piquant with turmeric. Zamboanga’s adobo is thick with coconut cream.” There are not only regional adobo variations, but countless personal variations with their own changes in technique or ingredients. As the Filipina writer Felice de Sta. Maria puts it, “There are as many adobo recipes as there are cooks, and as many favorite recipes as there are childhoods.” I would be hard-pressed to find another Filipino dish with this many individual versions.

But the story doesn’t end there. It continues in every part of the world to which Filipinos have moved. It is the Filipino diaspora that has elevated adobo to iconic status. Filipino college kids have been seen on U.S. campuses wearing “Got Adobo?” or “Love, Peace, and Adobo Grease” T-shirts. You can buy adobo-themed mugs, aprons, caps over the Web.

American food culture has picked up on the idea that being Filipino means eating or cooking adobo. It has become so powerfully associated with being Filipino that the noun itself is almost a synonym for national identity—the Website <adobo.com> has nothing to do with the dish but is a popular news and entertainment site geared towards a Filipino audience.

I am reminded of Yael Raviv's comment ("Falafel: A National Icon," *Gastronomica*, Vol. 3, No. 3, pp. 20–25) that falafel seems to be "most powerful as a symbol for outsiders (such as Jews living abroad or tourists) rather than for the people of Israel." Of course adobo also carries intense meaning on Filipino home ground. But invoking it abroad carries great emotional weight. Migrants must try to find their own place in a world different from the world of their birth—and food, particularly their native country's food, is one thing that helps keep them anchored in the familiar.

As Kenneth Minogue comments in *Nationalism*, an immigrant to America (or elsewhere) finds himself situated in a world where "no fixed structure exists by which he can live in a traditional pigeonhole or interpret the behavior of other men... In this new situation, where social structure has largely gone, culture becomes far more important." Perhaps the most poignant manifestations of "culture" in this sense are food and the ways in which migrants use it as a language to tell the world who they really are. Thus adobo offers the Filipino exile the pleasure of smelling, tasting, and savoring something deeply familiar, a trip down a memory lane of the palate.

**Postscript:** I did vary my mother's recipe a bit after I'd left home. I now add more crushed garlic, and I fry the pork pieces in olive oil instead of lard. I'm still using a cooking fat of my country's ex-conquerors, but one with different associations.

Ging Gutierrez Steinberg, *formerly a marketing communications specialist, received her M.A. in Food Studies and Food Management from New York University in 2005 and is a graduate of Le Cordon Bleu, Paris. She is currently consulting and writing for a variety of food-related publications.*

**FURTHER READING:** To learn more about *adobo* and other Filipino foods, some works you may wish to consult are Gilda Cordero-Fernando, *Philippine Food and Life* (Anvil Publishing, 1992) and the many works of the late Doreen G. Fernandez, especially *Tikim: Essays on Philippine Food and Culture* (Anvil Publishing, 1994) and the collaborative volume *The Food of the Philippines: Authentic Recipes from the Pearl of the Orient* (Periplus, 1998). The restaurant Cendrillon (45 Mercer St. NYC 10013) carries a selection of Filipino food books.

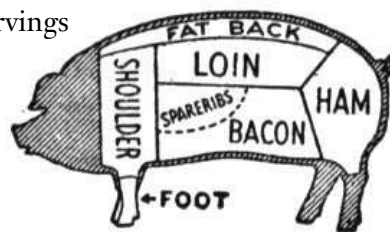
## Pork Adobo — My Mother's Recipe

2 pounds pork shoulder, cut into 2-inch pieces  
10 cloves garlic, crushed and peeled  
1 bay leaf  
1 tsp. whole black peppercorns, lightly crushed  
½ cup palm vinegar (or apple cider vinegar)  
¼ cup soy sauce  
2 tablespoons lard

In a large pot combine pork, garlic, bay leaf, peppercorns, vinegar, soy sauce and two cups water. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover, and simmer until meat is tender, about 1 ½ hours. Remove garlic pieces and pork from sauce and set aside. Discard bay leaf. Boil sauce over medium heat until about 1 ½ cups remain, about 20 minutes. Transfer sauce to a bowl and set aside.

Brown pork pieces in lard in same pot. Add garlic pieces and fry until lightly browned. Add reserved sauce to pot and simmer for 5 minutes. Serve with steamed white rice.

Makes 4 small servings



Cuts of pork

# UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Monday, April 3 — **History of Spices and the Medieval Culinary Aesthetic** by Paul Freeman

Paul Freedman, a medieval social historian and Chairman of the History Department at Yale University, describes the medieval infatuation with spices in both culinary and non-culinary terms—in relation to perfumes, medicine, and what might be called “lifestyle products” resembling modern aromatherapy—and discusses spices in relation to other traits of medieval cuisine: the love of color, artifice, complexity, the preference for game, birds, fish, the contempt for vegetables and dairy products. His forthcoming book, *Spices in the Middle Ages*, will be published in 2007.

Wednesday, June 7 — **Dining with Don Quixote** by Janet Mendel

Inspired by the adventures of Don Quixote, Janet Mendel explores the foods of Spain that have endured for centuries and their modern interpretations. Her new book, *Cooking From the Heart of Spain*, will be published on the heels of the 2005 celebration of the IV Centenary of Don Quixote, and the inauguration of the Don Quixote Route ([www.donquijotedelamancha2005.com](http://www.donquijotedelamancha2005.com)).

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