

## Thanksgiving, Immigration, and Americanization

By Abigail Carroll

IN 1884, *Harper's Weekly* published a lithograph entitled "Castle Garden—Their First Thanksgiving Dinner" depicting an immigrant family seated on a park bench having just arrived from Europe. Dressed in weather-beaten clothes and with only a single sack of belongings, the parents, young son, and infant partake of a particularly pathetic, cold-weather picnic. The father slices what appears to be a small brick of bread or cheese. The mother lifts a piece toward her mouth while comforting her restless baby. The son gorges on what appears to be a meager apple. Importantly, there is no table. Apparently the family is not aware that it is Thanksgiving Day. They are nibbling on crumbs in a land of plenty, eating as paupers on the national feast day. Furthermore, the park-bench setting prevents them from facing each other while they eat. Theirs is not a dinner but a mere snack. They silently consume the cold provisions with their hands. They have not yet benefited from the promise of the New World; they have not yet become Americans.

A contrast to the forlorn depiction presented in the 1884 image can be seen in another, though earlier sketch, in *Harper's Weekly* by Thomas Nast (see page 7). Instead of a single family at a park bench, "Uncle Sam's Thanksgiving Dinner" (1869) pictures a large group of men, women, and children at a



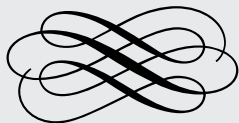
John St. Harper, "Castle Garden—Their First Thanksgiving Dinner," *Harper's Weekly*, November 29, 1884.

round table in a banquet hall. Instead of ragged traveling clothes, each wears the respective fashion of his or her native land. Instead of sitting in silence, the guests interact happily among themselves and with their host, Uncle Sam, who presides over the feast by carving the turkey at the head of the table. The table's centerpiece is a miniature classical pavilion set on a rock-like foundation into which are engraved the phrases "self government" and "universal suffrage." The invitation "Come one come all" and the statement "Free and equal" frame the image's lower corners. The iconography of the room communicates palpable messages about America's heritage and the promises of citizenship. On the left wall hangs framed paintings

*Continued on page 7*

### IN THIS ISSUE

From the Chair.....	2
America Eats.....	3
Culinary Bookshelf.....	4
Memories of Jewish Delis .....	5
Upcoming Programs .....	6
Karen Hess In Memorium ...	10
Member News .....	11



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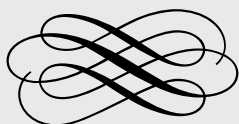
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# FROM THE CHAIR

LAST spring produced a bountiful harvest for the Culinary Historians of New York's Amelia Scholar's Grant program. On April 21, the Institute of Culinary Education hosted the America Eats Symposium, inspired by 2005 grantee Elizabeth Alsop's research into the Depression-era *America Eats* archives. Attended by over 60 symposiasts coming from as far away as Maine, Boston, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania, we were treated to stimulating and scholarly presentations by seven erudite panelists, assisted by two knowledgeable moderators, as well as a magnificent "church social" lunch based on recipes culled from the America Eats archives and period cookbooks. My thanks to everyone on a long list who worked to make the symposium a success, especially the many members who recreated foods from America Eats. Special kudos go to Elizabeth Alston, who was undaunted by the challenge of preparing a "ten-stacker" jelly cake that was repeatedly mentioned in the America Eats documents. My thanks also to all the speakers who brought their expertise to us; many generously donated their honoraria to support future awards for the Amelia Scholar's Grant, which we deeply appreciate.

Concluding the day's program was a discussion of a greater project for CHNY, and, indeed, for interested culinary historians nationwide: the attempt to locate, catalogue, and preserve reports from the America Eats project that may be hidden in local archives, historical societies, museums, and other places. The short-lived America Eats Project was abandoned in 1941 when the national



*Barbara Ketcham Wheaton receives the second Amelia Award.*

focus shifted from economic recovery to World War II; while some of the field research made it into appropriate repositories, the scholars who have worked with the archives share a belief that additional documents may be languishing throughout the country. The overwhelmingly enthusiastic response of the America Eats symposiasts to CHNY's proposal to act as a clearinghouse for the recovery effort was gratifying. We are currently formulating an action plan that will enlist volunteers nationwide, including historians, folklorists, archivists, and others familiar with ferreting out documentation, to search for missing files before they disappear forever and we lose a valuable source of community foodways in 1930s America. Once located, we will seek funding to preserve and make available to future generations this slice of America's culinary patrimony

The highlight of the America Eats Symposium, however, was the presentation of CHNY's second Amelia Award to Barbara Ketcham Wheaton, celebrating her extraor-

*Continued page 3*

# Unearthing Identity in the America Eats Project

By Elizabeth Alsop

IN the fall of 1940, Katharine Kellock, the National Tours Editor for the Federal Writers Project, and later, impresario of the America Eats Project, published an article in *The American Scholar*, celebrating the recent achievement of the WPA State Guide Books, “the first full-length portrait of the United States.”

In many ways, the America Eats Project seems to have been conceived as a corollary effort at self-portraiture: an attempt to take our country’s culinary, rather than merely geographic likeness; to map American foodways, just as the guides had mapped our roadways. Yet ultimately, America Eats provides less a finished portrait than a rough sketch. As I found in my own trips to the Library of Congress (which houses the bulk of the project archives), the materi-

als include not only a trove of tremendously interesting culinary data—how to build an Alabama pit barbecue, say, or what part of the intestine North Carolingians prefer for their chitlins—but significant gaps as well.

And yet as I discovered, the project still has much to tell us, not only about what we ate, but who we were—and are.

The Northeast materials—which I focused on in my research—provide a particularly useful case-study of the project’s strengths and weaknesses. It’s true, that as a region, the Northeast performed poorly (New



Programming Co-chair Diana Pittet with Scholar’s Grant committee member Anne McBride at the CHNY America Eats Symposium.

Hampshire, for one, failed to learn of the project until two weeks before deadline; from Pennsylvania, we find a survey of local mushrooms and the dubiously titled, “Hex Marks

*Continued page 9*

## From the Chair

*Continued from page 2*

dinary career in culinary history. No brief paragraph can do justice to Barbara’s stunning contributions, from her ground-breaking and award-winning 1983 *Savoring the Past: The French Kitchen From 1300–1789*, her several bibliographies of culinary history works and resources, her cutting edge work as a research associate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Media Lab on the future kitchen and table, her work as honorary curator of the culinary collection at Radcliffe College’s Schlesinger Library, her work as a trustee of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, to her recent dissemination of the Cook’s Oracle database representing over 30 years of her

research that will be made available to historians. Need I (although I easily could) say more? We were honored to bestow upon Barbara CHNY’s Amelia Award as part of the America Eats Symposium.

Moving into the future, CHNY has awarded its third Amelia Scholar’s Grant last June to Megan J. Elias, whose project, *Cooking the Books: Nationalism, Regionalism and American Cookbooks, 1865–1917*, will examine culinary archives to investigate how “regional identities were reconstructed and a new nationalism projected onto a global stage” between the Civil and First World Wars. We will look forward to hearing her report in the 2008–09 program season. My thanks to the members of the grant committee who reviewed this year’s

crop of six excellent proposals, each of which was well-conceived and meritorious.

I encourage everyone to consider contributing their time and talents to CHNY’s different activities, from working on programming to helping with the website or coordinating efforts on America Eats. You can contact any member of the board to volunteer, or contact me directly. Even if you cannot volunteer, please let us know what programs have been most valuable and enjoyable to you so we can continue to bring quality programs of interest to the membership.

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# Culinary Bookshelf

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## *PUTTING MEAT ON THE AMERICAN TABLE: TASTE, TECHNOLOGY, TRANSFORMATION* BY ROGER HOROWITZ

(Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006)

### Review by Alison Ryley

THIS is a nifty little book, and as timely as it is succinct. (For a considerably abbreviated version, consult the “Meat” entry in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America*.) *Putting Meat On the American Table: Taste, Technology, Transformation* charts in absorbing detail the rise and ascendancy of “technology” and “transformation” over “taste” and even “meat” in America: how the transformation was achieved, how the supporting technology developed historically, and how, in effect, the process became the product. Horowitz takes up, one by one, our national meats: beef, pork, frankfurters, and finally chicken (the meat).

Americans like meat. In colonial days, as reliably as can be determined, per capita consumption was about 150 pounds, a figure that rose continuously (dipping during the Great Depression) to a peak of over 200 pounds in the 1960s. Horowitz elects to consider meat as material culture, beginning with the very basic observation that “it is difficult to turn a living thing into a meal for human beings”: meat comes in inconvenient sizes and begins to deteriorate the moment its animal host is killed. The history of the American meat industry is a history of addressing these conditions.

Beef by its sheer size demonstrates the practical problem most visibly. Early on, cattle were slaughtered in small numbers close to

where they would be sold. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the centralization of slaughtering operations in the Midwest, together with the development of refrigeration and a national distribution system, combined to ensure the primacy of beef on American dinner plates. The constraints of climate had been all but conquered. Packaging did the rest.

Before these developments had made beef more accessible, versatile pork, dry or wet cured, was the leading American meat. By 1850, the industrialization of pork processing was well under way, with such operations eventually centering in Chicago. Industrialization had the additional effect of systematizing and standardizing consumer choices: “Vernacular styles became regulated varieties.” Within another century, though ham retained its elevated class status, pork had otherwise become an entirely different meat.

The apotheosis of processing techniques, attained at the 1939 World’s Fair in the “food of tomorrow” for the “World of Tomorrow,” was (step right up, ladies and gents) the hot dog! “a meat cocktail,” as Horowitz describes it, “defined not by its contents but instead by its size, shape, and curative qualities” and consumed in a happy context of popular entertainment and family fun. From cured sausage to uniform frankfurter was a great leap. Swift & Company had made the breakthrough, emulsifying the sausage meat and integrating the hot dog

production line. Artificial casing made standardization complete.

The frankfurter was surely an unqualified triumph for meat technology, but perhaps even more dramatic was the change to come in the status and very concept of chicken. The Delmarva “Chicken of Tomorrow” festival in June 1948, set about—with enthusiastic support from the retail industry and the USDA—to foster “production of superior *meat*-type chickens” (emphasis mine).

Poultry consumption had traditionally been associated with the farm and the rural cycle of harvesting eggs. The farm cycle produced young (spring) chickens seasonally, but as with other meats, the advent of refrigeration tended to make the seasons irrelevant. Integrated processing, the mechanization of manual operations, the development of branding strategies—the methods of modern industry—remade the chicken. By 1965, six or seven “harvests” were possible each year, regardless of climate. With variations according to region or ethnic background, per capita consumption had reached about 45 pounds. Once a special occasion item, chicken was now cheap and packaged for convenience. Fifty years after the Delmarva festival, poultry *had* become a superior meat-type product, by the eighties challenging beef as our favorite meat. This represented an extraordinary shift in American foodways, reflecting profound post-war changes in American social and family life.

“By the end of the twentieth century, meat producers’ search for convenience had generated significant interventions into animal biology. Animals were ‘grown’ more than they were raised.” “Spring chicken” lives on in a corny laugh

line. Applied also to hog production, the demand for shorter maturation has encouraged confinement agriculture with commercial feeds. Antibiotics and new feeding methods have likewise altered the dynamics of cattle raising.

Convenient meats come at a price. The effects of feed additives and the profligate use of antibiotics, the problem of bacterial contamination endemic to industrialized production methods, the list goes on... to say nothing of the human impact of industrialization on the farmers who grow meat and the workers who process it. Both groups have experienced major losses and dislocations.

In the end, Horowitz observes, “meat remains a sign of the good life, the American life... even as Americans remain skittish about the wholesomeness of our food system,” a slightly tame finale to a strong presentation (it is important to note that the author makes no value-judgments.) We draw our own conclusions.

Meanwhile, this is an original, lively, well-documented contribution to the reference library of food technology, a valuable resource for the researcher and for any of us who care to know what befalls the hapless hog, say, en route from birth to “lagoon.”

*Alison Ryley is a retired reference librarian at the The New York Public Library, where she was a bibliographer for culinary history with a special interest in the menu collection.*

## Memories of Jewish Delis

By Lorna Sass

*This essay is an edited excerpt of a longer piece published in 1988 under the title “The Great Nosh: Some Landmark New York Delis” in The Journal of Gastronomy (Volume 4, Number 1, Spring, 1988). More deli history can be found at these websites: Katz’s Deli’s ([www.katzdeli.com](http://www.katzdeli.com)) and the Stage Deli ([www.stagedeli.com](http://www.stagedeli.com)).*

“THERE is cold joy in a salami sandwich eaten outside the steamy atmosphere of a New York kosher delicatessen,” Ruth Glazer wrote back in 1946 in a *Commentary* article titled “The Jewish Delicatessen: The Evolution of an Institution.” On the Lower East Side the truth of this statement was brought home to me as I was attempting to get my jaw around a hot pastrami on rye at Katz’s Delicatessen.

As the waiter delivered my bottle of Dr. Brown’s Cel-Ray soda—a quintessential part of the New York deli experience—he asked me if I’d heard about the guy at the cemetery who was found by a passerby wailing “Why did you die so young?” over his wife’s tombstone. When the concerned onlooker offered condolences on her death, the grieving man stopped sobbing long enough to answer, “This isn’t my wife buried here, you dummy; it’s her first husband.”

As I laughed and offered sympathy to the waiter for his bandaged finger, he *kvetched* with a shrug of his slouched shoulders, “That’s what you get for working in the restaurant business.” It was then that I concluded that the best flavor enhancer for a hot pastrami sandwich was not the mustard, it was the *kibitzing* and *shmaltz* that come from a 65-year-old Jewish waiter who shuffles on tired

feet, wears grease-smudged glasses, and with a Yiddish accent barks at customers “That’s the only table we got left. You want to eat don’t you?” and then stands as the moral arbiter of right and wrong when he says, “If you want sauerkraut on your pastrami sandwich, you’re gonna have to put it on yourself. What jerk would wanna eat a sandwich with soggy bread?”

Although you can still get a fine hot pastrami or corned beef sandwich in Gotham, the sights, sounds, and smells of the old New York Jewish deli are vanishing along with the salamis that hang in their windows.

In the old days, if anyone dared to ask for lean corned beef, the waiter would put on his most disapproving look and yell: “*Vich vay* do you want it to lean?” Service usually consisted of sliding the sandwich-laden plate to you as if the waiter was practicing for the local bowling league and twenty minutes later, he would abruptly ask if you came to “eat or sit and *kibitz*.”

Bernie Styles, a venerable owner of the Central Casting Talent Agency nostalgically described a deli as the “corned beef cabaret,” a place where everyone was counting pennies but no one knew from calories. “If I had my life to live over, I’d live over a deli, and to tell you the truth, I live right over The Stage Deli, so I’m living my life over right now,” chirped Styles.

And before the Stage, there was the Gaiety. “Back in the thirties and forties,” he recalled, “eating out on ‘the street’ (the colloquial name for Broadway) was a very important part of our culture. We’d meet to eat and eat to meet and at any given hour you always knew where to find somebody amusing to talk to.”

Styles described the Gaiety as being no more than ten feet wide

*Continued on page 6*

## Deli Memories

*Continued from page 5*

and having only a few tables. As at Katz's, the waiters were in control. A preferred customer received a good seat and was never rushed. Another chosen customer might be seated next to a pretty girl. One reason the place was always jammed was that the Gaiety was the first deli to serve overstuffed sandwiches and you could even order a half-sandwich if you were short of cash. "If things were really rough, you'd eat salami—a nickel a *schtikle*'—or a hot dog—the real kind, rolled on a grill—but if you were flush, you'd have pastrami or corned beef." The meat was usually served on rye, but for those who wanted to splurge, an extra nickel brought you "club bread" which was similar to French bread. The Gaiety backed onto a burlesque theater on 44th Street, and customers were elbow-to-elbow with actors, and since actors were often broke, the overstuffed sandwich would become their only meal of the day.

It was as a counterman at the Gaiety that the legendary Russian émigré Max Asnas got his start. In 1937, Asnas opened the renown Stage delicatessen. Billed as "The Delicatessen of the Performing Arts," a customer once asked why he was never seen eating at his own restaurant and without hesitation he replied: "Who can afford the prices?" Short and pudgy, he was quick with the one-liners and encouraged his waiters to do the same. Once after a customer complained to a waiter that he did not like the looks of the whitefish, the waiter replied, "You want looks? Order a goldfish." Another time, a party of four tourists ordered sandwiches and coffee. One of them demanded that the waiter make sure that the coffee arrives in an "absolutely clean cup." When the

# UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Wednesday, October 24  
**Bones of Retention: Exploring the Prehistoric Human Diet** with Andrew Sillen, vice-president at Brooklyn College and formerly professor of archaeology at the University of Cape Town

Monday, November 26  
**Molecular Gastronomy** with Mitchell Davis and Hervé This

Monday, December 17  
**Dry Manhattan: Prohibition in New York City** with Michael Lerner

Monday, January 7, 2008  
**Topic to be Announced** with Rachel Laudan

Thursday, January 31, 2008:  
**Celebration and Feasting During Lafayette's 1824–25 Tour of the United States** with David Clary, author of *Adopted Son: Washington, Lafayette and the Friendship that Saved the Revolution*, honoring the 250th anniversary of the birth of the Marquis de Lafayette.

waiter returned with the order, he inquired, "Now, which one of you gets the clean cup?" When a woman complained to Asnas that his food gave her heartburn, he shot back the response "What did you expect—sunburn? Go to Miami."

Asnas customers got so used to getting hit with his barbs that they felt disappointed when he ignored them. "Hey Max, you don't insult me any more, what's wrong? Are you mad at me?" But he didn't only dish it out, he could take it, too. Once, when the Stage had a fire, Milton Berle sent him a wire: "This is the first time in years that the food in your place has been hot."

When I recently went to the beloved Second Avenue Deli, I overheard an elegantly dressed lady ask a waiter, "What is *shav*?" The waiter answered impatiently: "Lady, if you don't know what it is, I know you're not going to like it." Like *shav* (sorrel, or sour grass soup), the foods served

in a Jewish deli are living relics of time gone by. As the late comic Sam Levenson stated best: "Somewhat in the style of Marcel Proust, most of the customers [in a Jewish deli] are involved in a contemporary *recherche du temps perdu*... a remembrance of things past, of a Jewish way of life all but destroyed... ."

**Lorna Sass** holds a Ph.D. in medieval literature from Columbia University. She began her career in food writing with a medieval cookbook, *To the King's Taste*, published by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and then went on to write three other historical cookbooks, all published by the museum. She then segued into pressure cooking, another somewhat historical arena. She has also written numerous volumes on vegan vegetarian cooking. Her 14th cookbook, *Whole Grains Every Day, Every Way* (Clarkson Potter, 2006) won the 2007 James Beard Foundation award in the category of *Healthy Focus*.

## Thanksgiving

*Continued from page 1*

of Lincoln, Washington, and Grant, while on the far wall, a painting of Castle Garden features the capitalized greeting, “Welcome.”

Nast’s 1869 sketch communicates a pro-immigration message that emphasizes the United States as a land of freedom. Harmony at the table results from the abundance of its fare. Democracy, represented most clearly in the centerpiece, ensures that all are partakers of plenty. Though the foreign guests proudly display their native origins by way of their garments, the differences between them are subject to the higher figures: Uncle Sam, the political and military personages in the paintings on the wall, and democratic ideals as personified in various statues. A painting of Castle Island, the immigrants’ destination, is situated on the far right of the image, the head of Uncle Sam eclipsing part of the frame. The most overt action in the picture is the carving of the turkey, which acts as a bridge between the foreign guests and the entrance to the New World. Food consumed in the communal context of a meal, and the turkey in particular, constitutes a step in the journey toward the immigrant’s destination, in this case not simply the geographical location of Castle Island but the state of being an American.

Late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century reformers working to uplift the poor and acculturate immigrants found Thanksgiving to be an ideal occasion for the articulation of American, middle-class identity. They held Thanksgiving pageants at settlement houses, recounted the Pilgrim and Native-American feast in English textbooks, and showed “photo-plays” like “Why We Cel-



Thomas Nast, “Uncle Sam’s Thanksgiving Dinner,” *Harper’s Weekly*, November 20, 1869.

brate Thanksgiving” as preludes to foreign-language films. More educational materials were issued in schools for Thanksgiving than any other holiday. Many of these were participatory, designed both for classroom use and as scripts for Thanksgiving programs became educational devices, placing students in the roles of teachers, who in turn instructed family and friends on the importance of the holiday. Poems, songs, plays, and tableaux constituted the bulk of the publications, most of which either recreated a scene in Plymouth, hailed the attributes of a particular Thanksgiving food, or recounted a moral tale of gratitude in a modern setting.

Though these materials may have been aimed at a general audience of American school children, it is likely that the authors considered foreign children as part of their readership. Many of the plays and recitations emphasize the journey aspect of the pilgrim story. *The Pilgrim’s Thanksgiving* (1924) by Dorothy Lehman Sumerau opens with a group of pilgrim women shelling corn, paring turnips, sewing carpet rags, and

reminiscing about England and Holland. They discuss many of the same issues contemporary immigrants faced, like learning a new language. They recall the oppression they left behind, the “thrill and the dread” of the ocean waves during the crossing, and the anticipation of living in a land “of which we had never even dreamed.”

The disappointment of arriving in a place that did not meet every expectation was a theme in Sumerau’s play. “I had looked for beautiful Virginia that we had heard so much about” says one of the characters. “Instead of seeing prosperity and comfortable homes, we found but solitude and snow.” Hard work, as experienced by most contemporary immigrants, is another of the skit’s themes. The young women keep busy with their chores and talk of building shelter, nursing the sick, and caring for their infants in adverse conditions. The tone of the performance changes from melancholy lamentation to lyrical celebration as the pilgrim children happily munch grapes and recite a list of nature’s

*Continued on page 8*

## Thanksgiving

*Continued from page 7*

bounty in their new land: “corn, nuts, grapes, rabbits, venison, tobacco, pumpkins, turkeys, fish, onions, potatoes, and red berries.” The script ends with the “first Thanksgiving feast” shared by the pilgrims and their Native American friends.

*The Pilgrims’ Thanksgiving* is typical of the pilgrim stories in 1920s school programs. They generally emphasize the Pilgrims’ journey to England and Holland before their famous voyage on the Mayflower to Plymouth. Some deal with issues of adaptation. Almost all deal with hardship. Significantly, these plays typically culminate in a feast that suggests successful assimilation through partaking of the New World’s abundance. The cover of a 1927 compilation of Thanksgiving school programs, including pageant scripts, poetry, and tableaux, illustrates this concept of acculturation through foodways. Two young Pilgrims, one carrying a Bible and the other a walking stick, are surrounded by the abundance of the New World as represented by turkeys, pumpkins, and sheaves of wheat. These foods form a door through which the Pilgrim passes toward future prosperity, and the twentieth-century pupil enters history. In light of immigration, this can also be seen as a metaphorical gateway to America.

If food as a theatrical prop in a Thanksgiving play or as a spelling word in an English lesson served as an educational instrument, so too, did food on the table. Thomas Nast’s idealized image of the nations coming together around the Thanksgiving table was not a mere fiction. In 1881, the Commissioner of Immigration provided

Castle Island, New York’s first official port of entry, with 200 tickets for Thanksgiving dinners at the German House, so that the day’s incoming foreigners might partake of the national meal. In 1894, *The New York Times* reported that 350 detainees at Ellis Island feasted on “turkeys, pies, vegetables, and pudding.” Eighteen of the revelers were awaiting deportation. By 1902, the *Times* reported that 800 feasted on “turkey, mince, and pumpkin pies, and other indigenous delectables.”

Over time the emphasis of Thanksgiving dinners at Castle Garden, and later Ellis Island, shifted from charity to instruction, even perhaps propaganda. Though words were central to the official holiday teachings, food ultimately carried the message. In 1904, the Commissioner of Immigration explained the day’s significance to the 900 waiting to be registered, “but the impression made by the unexpected feast,” explained a *Times* reporter in 1904, “proved the most lasting.” Turkey and trimmings became an object lesson in American values: “The celebration will have inestimable value in teaching the new-comers to our shores something of the institutions of the land they are about to adopt as their own,” commented another *Times* reporter. At the 1905 celebration he covered, immigrants were told that “the treats in store for them were born of the national desire to give thanks for the benefits enjoyed under our free government.”

By the first decade of the century, menus printed in diverse languages decorated the walls of the facility, enabling foreign-language speakers to interpret the bill of fare. A Jewish caterer was even on hand to accommodate those with dietary restrictions.

Thomas Nast’s 1869 image was perhaps best personified in the 1922 Thanksgiving celebration at Ellis Island, at which the *Times* described “families from almost every corner of the earth ate turkey [and] cranberry sauce... ‘This is truly the all-American holiday,’” commented the Commissioner of Immigration. “I want these men and women and children who are soon to take up the responsibilities and the honors of American citizenship, to join in the spirit of the occasion and feel that, as they sit down to their Thanksgiving dinner, they are also sitting in with the great American family of democracy.”

During the era of mass migration Thanksgiving served as a strategic tool of Americanization, a way to introduce immigrants to American ideals. Through it, teachers, reformers, and social workers hoped to engage foreigners in the nation’s culture, history, and values. Thanksgiving, however, was not merely instructional. As a meal, it constituted an opportunity for transformation. Participation in the national feast was a kind of ritualistic inscription into the national family. Eating turkey and pumpkin pie at Ellis Island afforded both a taste of the New World and an opportunity to acquire cultural, if not legal, citizenship.

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## America Eats

*Continued from page 3*

the Spot”). Other states, luckily, displayed far greater enthusiasm for their region’s food culture and customs. Vermont’s writers, for instance, provide an impressively unified account of the state’s culinary preferences: Doughnuts and pickles, yes; salad, no. As they explain, “Fancy foods and frothy things are not popular in the State, whose people go for plain, solid, substantial foodstuffs.”

In pursuit of such local color, many writers profited by what Kellock called “the ever-absorbing divisions of opinion concerning ingredients and cooking methods.” Thus, Rhode Island takes up the chowder wars, noting “it is... possible to raise a good rip-roaring argument on the subject of clams versus quahogs,” and offer insights on local johnny cake preferences: “the Islanders like the thin cakes with crisp crust; the Mainlanders prefer more substantial matter separating their crispness.”

Even better is the writer who knows not only about local custom, but cookery, too—as we find in one account of a chicken pie supper in Vermont. Clearly, the author is on intimate terms with the menu, mentioning that a “richer than usual biscuit dough” must be used for the pie topping, and that the cloverleaf roll has recently supplanted the Parker House in popularity. She includes a cloverleaf recipe which “may be a lot of work,” but as she assures us, the results are “both good, and good looking, which counts a lot at a church supper.”

Best, of course, is when the writer managed both literary flair and a firm grasp of regional cookery—a challenge brought off particu-

larly well in an account of a Vermont sugaring-off:

“As the sun climbs the day grows warm. The snow patches soften and melt, the eaves drip, and in the sugar orchards sap tinkles into the pails. Farmers look at the weather and nod significantly. ‘She’s going to run today, boys, she’ll sure run today.’ It is the perfect sugaring day.”

While this essay, in the interest of more thoroughly describing the “eating event,” may fall short of being a truly great read, others tend in the opposite direction, privileging narrative flow over attention to food and drink. Such is the case with a brief account of New York “Literary Teas,” which, the author assures us, “are given upon the slightest provocation”:

“The locale of these parties varies from private apartments to special rooms at the smart night clubs and hotels. One condition is paramount, however, the place must always be jammed. Seemingly no literary tea is successful unless it is crowded enough to make an exchange of intellectual ideas an impossibility.”

As the author goes on to describe the “few uninteresting canapés passed haphazardly about, with few takers,” and the publisher, “frantically trying to circulate [his author] among the ‘right’ people,” one is startled by the piece’s contemporary feel. As food-writing, it may be lackluster—but as social commentary, it’s spot-on.

Similarly savvy are accounts of “The Automat” (which includes the mystifying claim that “No New York wife knows her husband until she has seen him in an automat”), and a great essay called “A Drug-Store Luncheon,” which comes equipped with a fascinating catalogue of diner-slang. Alongside the more predictable “Adam and Eve on a Raft” (two eggs

on toast), there’s the enigmatic “Jack Benny in the red” (strawberry jello), or the thankfully-antiquated “C.O. cocktail” (castor oil in soda).

In some sense, I think the best pieces, whether from the back-roads of Vermont or the mean streets of New York, are those in which the prose itself manages to convey certain regional peculiarities and is able to telegraph, in style, a certain taste in food. Thus the “plain, solid, substantial” appetite of the Vermonter finds expression in the writer’s spare, almost Frost-like prose; the New Yorker’s, in hard-boiled wit.

Then there are those pieces that just astonish—that qualify simply as literature rather than as “food literature.” Reading through one account of a Connecticut “May Breakfast,” for instance, we slowly realize that the author has offered us not merely a glimpse into a 1940s fruit cellar, but into a life. And such is the case with my favorite piece from the project, a narrative centered around an Iowa thresher’s dinner. When America Eats editor Lyle Saxon requested they publish the piece “exactly as it is,” the national office pointed out that, at 5000 words, the piece is 3500 words longer than was allotted. One can only hope that we may soon be able to rectify their mistake, and to bring this story, and the many others buried alongside it, to light.

**Elizabeth Alsop**, recipient of the 2005 Amelia Scholar’s Grant, received a B.A. from Brown University and is currently a third-year doctoral student in Comparative Literature at the CUNY Graduate Center. She teaches literature at Queens College. Previously, she worked as an editor at Martha Stewart Living magazine, and as a research assistant to Vogue food editor Jeffrey Steingarten.

# KAREN HESS

By Andrew F. Smith

**K**AREN HESS, a culinary historian and the recipient of the CHNY's first Amelia Award for her outstanding work in the field of culinary history, died last May. She co-authored with her husband, John L. Hess, *The Taste of America*. Published in 1977, it challenged many core understandings about American food and the authors were less than complimentary about such luminaries as Julia Child, Craig Claiborne, and James Beard.

The issues raised in the book haunted me and incited a desire to begin an exploration of culinary history. It wasn't until after a decade of subsequent research that I phoned Karen—her phone number was listed in the phone book—and asked her a few questions. She had no idea who I was, as I had written nothing on culinary history. Yet we talked for more than a half hour.

Thus began a two-decade conversation with Karen, who challenged my views, offered tips, and encouraged me when I was depressed. She was always there for a good challenging conversation. I'm delighted to report that when I became the editor of the University of Illinois Press's "Food Series," the first thing that I did was to reprint *The Taste of America*, which had gone out of print.

Karen wrote extensively about culinary history, including the introductions to: the

American edition of Elizabeth David's *English Bread and Yeast Cookery* (1990); *Martha Washington's Booke of Cookery* (1981); Mary Randolph's *The Virginia House-wife* (1984); *The Carolina Rice Kitchen: The African Connection* (1992); Mrs. Abby Fisher's *What Mrs. Fisher Knows about Old Southern Cooking* (1995); and Amelia Simon's *American Cookery* (1996). She had been working for a decade on her magnum opus, "Mr. Jefferson's Table," when she died.

All of Karen's published works remain in print and I encourage anyone who hasn't had the opportunity to read them to do so. They have survived the test of time and will continue far into the future to be employed by those interested in culinary history.

I did not always agree with her views, which she expressed vociferously on occasion, but the issues she raised always merited careful consideration. I miss her—and so will all those who believe in working with academic rigor in our approach to culinary history.

**Andrew F. Smith** teaches culinary history and professional food writing at the New School in Manhattan, chairs The Culinary Trust, the philanthropic partner of LACP, and has written or edited sixteen books, including *The Oxford Companion to American Food and Drink* released last April.



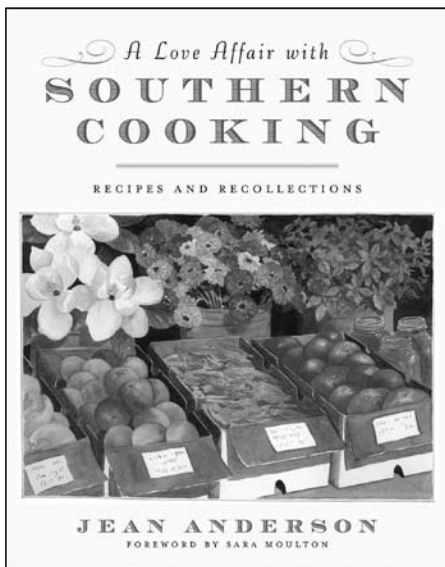
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# Member News

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After four years of research, recipe testing, and writing, **Jean Anderson's** *A Love Affair with Southern Cooking* will be published in October by William Morrow. Though there are 200 recipes, the book is as much a culinary memoir and history as cookbook. A time line documents important Southern food firsts, sidebars profile major players like Thomas Jefferson, Mary Randolph, and George Washington Carver as well as “born-in-the-South” Moon Pies, Coke, Jack Daniel’s, and more. Sara Moulton wrote the foreword, Joanne Lamb Hayes and Georgia Downard double-checked recipes.

**Diane Harris Brown** is working with culinary historian Barbara Haber to present “Beard on Books.” The monthly literary series in the dining room of the James Beard House features readings and discussions with many of the food world’s most celebrated authors. The fall presentations are by: Matt and Ted Lee, Alex Prud’homme, Molly O’Neill, Jacques Pepin, Hervé This,

and Jake Tilson. See [www.jamesbeard.org](http://www.jamesbeard.org) and click on “Education” for details.

**Carolina M. Capehart** conducted “*Fireside Feasts*,” a series of open-fire cooking classes at Brooklyn’s Wyckoff Farmhouse Museum this summer. Visitors assisted her in preparing recipes taken from the Wyckoff Family manuscript book as well as from other 18th and early 19th century works. The Wyckoff Farmhouse Museum is New York City’s oldest house, built in 1652.

**Jody Eddy** completed an article for the New York Food Museum on the cholera pandemic that swept through New York and the rest of the nation in 1832. She is also contributing two pieces to *Be Our Guest: The History of Entertaining Through History and Cultures* to be published by Greenwood Press. Jody’s website is [www.eddybles.com](http://www.eddybles.com).

“Cooking For Eggheads,” an article by **Patricia Gadsby** about the phenomenon of molecular gastronomy, has been selected for two year-end collections: *The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2007* (Houghton Mifflin Company) and *The Best American Science Writing 2007* (The Ecco Press). The article first appeared in *Discover* magazine. It describes a day experimenting with eggs in the laboratory of Hervé This, a French chemist and one of molecular gastronomy’s leading lights. It also sheds light on his friendly collaboration with the chef Pierre Gagnaire (see Upcoming Programs on page 6).

“Sustainable Farming and Buying Local,” and “Jersey’s June Harvest” were the titles of programs offered by **Judith Krall-Russo** to educate students of the Promise Jobs Culinary School in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and members of the school’s local community outreach segment about local farming. She also will be offering tea programs at the school. The first was “A Tea Primer: Tips on Buying, Brewing, and Storing Tea.” See her website ([www.teafoodhistory.com](http://www.teafoodhistory.com)) for further details.

**Michael Krongl**’s new book *The Taste of Conquest: The Rise and Fall of the Three Great Cities of Spice* will be published by Random House in October under the Ballantine imprint. The book is a popular history of the fashion for spice in pre-modern Europe and of those who traveled the oceans to satisfy the cravings for pepper, cinnamon, and other eastern aromatics. The story focuses on three ports—Venice, Lisbon, and Amsterdam—whose sailors and merchants changed the shape of history. For more information see: [www.spicehistory.net](http://www.spicehistory.net).

At the invitation of Green & Black’s, an organic chocolate company, **Alexandra Leaf** traveled to Belize to visit Mayan farmers. She is continuing her tours of Manhattan’s boutique chocolatiers through her company Chocolate Tours of New York City, Inc. ([www.chocolate-toursnyc.com](http://www.chocolate-toursnyc.com)). On November 4th, at the 92nd St. Y, Alexandra will moderate a program exploring the front and back of the house worlds of celebrity chefs. The program is

*Continued on page 12*

## Member News

*Continued from page 11*

titled “The Uber Chef,” and the panel consists of Marco Pierre White, Thomas Keller, and William Grimes.

In May, the website *Leite’s Culinaria* by **David Leite** and Linda Avery won the 2007 James Beard Award for the best Website Focusing on Food, Beverage, Restaurant, or Nutrition. David is also spending much of the summer and fall in Portugal researching his Portuguese cookbook, which will be published by Clarkson Potter.

**Nora Maynard** has contributed two articles (“Frozen Food” and “Post”) to *The Business of Food: Encyclopedia of the Food and Drink Industries* (Gary Allen and Ken Albala, eds.) to be published by the Greenwood Press. She has been awarded residencies at The Millay Colony for the Arts and The Ragdale Foundation this fall. [www.noramaynard.com](http://www.noramaynard.com).

**Marion Nestle** has an article based on her book, *What to Eat*, in the September issue of *Scientific American* and a newly revised and updated edition of her book *Food Politics* will be published by University of California press in October. The August issue of *Cooking Light* features her as one of three women honored as “Movers and Taste Shapers.” Marion also won the James Beard Reference award for her book *What to Eat* (North Point/Farrar, Strauss and Giroux).

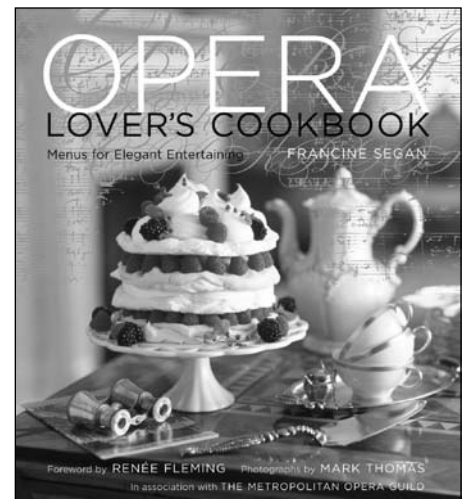
**Susan McLellan Plaisted**, proprietress of Heart to Hearth Cookery, will be giving two programs as a 2008-2009 Pennsylvania Humanities Council Commonwealth speaker. The two presentations are: “Dining with William Penn” and “Lenape

Foodways: The Food Technology of Pennsylvania’s Early Inhabitants.” Heart to Hearth Cookery and the Buck’s County Conference and Visitor’s Bureau will cosponsor a program by Ivan Day, renowned English food historian titled “High Status Dining in the 18th Century.” The event will take place on November 11 and more information is on Susan’s website [www.hearttohearth-cookery.com](http://www.hearttohearth-cookery.com).

In June **Ammini Ramachandran** made a presentation titled “Demystifying India’s Spice Coast” based on her book *Grains, Greens, and Grated Coconuts*. It was organized by the New York Women’s Culinary Alliance at the Indian restaurant, Devi. In addition to teaching vegetarian cooking classes, Ammini has been doing readings and book signings. Her schedule is posted at [www.peppertrail.com](http://www.peppertrail.com).

**Peter G. Rose** is traveling around New York State this fall giving lectures on “The Influence of the Dutch on the American Kitchen.” See her website [www.peterrose.com](http://www.peterrose.com) for further information. She was a speaker at the Second Biennial Culinary History Symposium, “Regional and Ethnic Traditions” held at the Longone Center for American Culinary Research in Ann Arbor.

**Francine Segan’s** fourth book, *Opera Lover’s Cookbook*, was nominated for the James Beard and IACP awards this year. She is lecturing on the role of food in opera, for groups such as the Metropolitan Opera Guild, Opera Company of Philadelphia, and New Jersey State Opera. She also speaks on a variety of other food topics from the “History of Aphrodisiacs” to “Food in Film.” Francine is currently editing a three-volume



encyclopedia for Greenwood Press entitled *Be Our Guest: The History of Entertaining Through History and Cultures* and welcomes interested contributors to contact her through: [www.FrancineSegan.com](http://www.FrancineSegan.com).

**Laura Shapiro** is delighted to announce the arrival of her new book *Julia Child*, published last April as part of the Penguin Lives series.

