

# NYFOODSTORY

The Journal of the Culinary Historians of New York

Volume 3 • 2014

## Rebecca Turner, 'famous cook' of Eastchester

One historian's quest to learn about a long-forgotten slave and the mores and foodways of her time

*Editor's Note: Larry H. Spruill received a CHNY's Scholar's Grant for 2012 to underwrite his research on the freed slave, Rebecca Turner, her family and their foodways. This is an account of some of his research.*

By Larry H. Spruill

EASTCHESTER AND ITS QUIANT VILLAGES ARE SYNONYMOUS WITH THE BEST QUALITIES OF AMERICAN SUBURBAN LIFE, symbolizing middle class comforts and abundance. Suggestions of historical connections between its modern self-image and African slavery are usually met with disbelief and even ridicule. Yet, such ties exist, buried in plain sight, in yellowing ledgers and antique memoirs.

On October 20, 1895, a reporter from *The New York Times* toured the town and wrote,

*"The oldest surviving native of East Chester is Aunt 'Mary Treadwell,' [w]ho is now in the ninetieth year of her age... with her well educated, prepossessing niece, she occupies a little unpainted, weather beaten cottage situated at the edge of East Chester Creek, almost*

*in the shadow of old St. Paul's Church. The old homestead of her family, built over a century ago, is among the interesting curiosities of its kind in that vicinity. 'Aunt Mary's' mother, who was known throughout that region as 'Aunt Becky Turner' had been a slave in early life... for many years she was a famous cook in service at Guion's Tavern..."<sup>1</sup>*

Rebecca Turner, "a famous cook," Mary Turner-Treadwell and her niece, Sarah Elizabeth Turner-Nelson were "old" New Yorkers with ties to the founding Dutch and English settlers. At the dawn of the 20th century these three generations of African American women were said to be among Eastchester's "relics, landmarks, and mementos of the far-away past... undisturbed by the invasion of spectators and unchanged by the progress of suburban improvements."<sup>2</sup> *The Times* provided little biographical information beyond



Photo by Larry H. Spruill

Rebecca Turner, a well-known cook in 19th-century Eastchester, New York, was all but forgotten. In 2012 her gravesite was positively identified near her daughter Emmeline Turner-Pierce's faded marble headstone. Rebecca's name was inscribed on a tombstone for public viewing as part of St. Paul's Church and Cemetery National Historic Site.

their names, ages, hints of education and the deceased matriarch's occupation. More than 100 years later, these skeletal clues inspired me to undertake extended excavation to reveal their deepest meaning. My research eventually unearthed the fascinating story of the life of this family, in the kitchen and beyond. Their combined long lives allowed these women to be eyewitnesses to the town's history from the Revolutionary War to the bombing of Pearl Harbor.<sup>3</sup> Mary and her niece, Sarah Elizabeth, told the *Times* reporter an unconventional Eastchester story

continued on page sixteen ►

## The faces behind the lunch counter

Female school cafeteria workers in postwar New York

By Shayne Leslie Figueroa

TUNA CASSEROLE, LARGE RECTANGULAR PIZZA, HOT DOGS IN TOASTED BUNS, MULTITUDES OF MILK CARTONS AND MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN IN HAIRNETS serving it all up with a smile: these are some of the familiar images of New York City school cafeterias in the 1950s and '60s. The menu items may evoke smiles of nostalgia or grimaces of disgust, but the employees are almost universally remembered in a positive light for their hard work to ensure that millions of

baby-boomers received a decent midday meal. In addition to their culinary knowledge and skills, the majority of front-line school lunch workers belonged to a union during the postwar period and still do today.

Lunchrooms served as the domain of both professional women such as nutritionists and dietitians, as well as cooks and semi-skilled laborers. In contrast, big labor's organizational structure placed men in leadership positions and women primarily in supporting roles at

continued on page six ►

## INSIDE

|                                                             |    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Letter from the CHNY Chair .....                            | 2  |
| Letter from the Editor .....                                | 2  |
| Kimberly Wilmot Voss on the original New York foodies ..... | 3  |
| Ari Ariel interviews historian Hasia Diner .....            | 4  |
| Members' Books in 2014 .....                                | 24 |
| Angie Cruz on <i>platanos</i> , food and symbol .....       | 27 |

Cathy Kaufman, Chair  
Holley Atkinson, Vice Chair  
Nicole P. Stoner, Secretary  
Tanah Spencer, Treasurer  
Carolyn Vaughan, Programming  
Donna Gelb, Public Relations  
Linda Pelaccio, At-Large

Editor-in-Chief, Ari Ariel  
Managing Editor, Karen Berman

Culinary Historians of New York (CHNY) was founded in 1985 to stimulate and share knowledge of the ways food has affected humans (and humans, food) since earliest times.

Members of CHNY include chefs, cooking teachers, historians, anthropologists, food writers, food editors, food stylists, researchers, librarians, caterers, collectors, nutritionists and individuals who enjoy learning about cooking and eating good food.

#### SUBMISSIONS

*NYFoodstory* accepts proposals for articles on the culinary history of New York. Send proposals of no more than 100 words to Ari Ariel, editor-in-chief at [ari-ariel@uiowa.edu](mailto:ari-ariel@uiowa.edu) by January 9, 2015.

#### VISIT US

[www.culinaryhistoriansny.org](http://www.culinaryhistoriansny.org)

#### FOLLOW US

On Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/  
CulinaryHistoriansNY](http://www.facebook.com/CulinaryHistoriansNY)

On Twitter:

@CulinaryHistNY

On Instagram:

[http://instagram.com/  
culinaryhistoriansny](http://instagram.com/culinaryhistoriansny)

#### JOIN US

For information on membership, visit [www.culinaryhistoriansny.org/join.html](http://www.culinaryhistoriansny.org/join.html)

#### WRITE TO US

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

© 2014 Culinary Historians of New York, Inc. Inc., in the collective work. Copyright in the individual works remains in the authors. Permission is required to reproduce these works in any form.

## LETTER FROM THE CHNY CHAIR

### A new editor and some exciting scholarship

*Cathy Kaufman*

Our journal, *NYFoodStory*, is celebrating its third issue under the able stewardship of CHNY member Ari Ariel. Ari received his PhD from Columbia University and has recently retired from his active position on the CHNY Board of Directors after accepting a teaching position in the University of Iowa's Department of Religious Studies. We will miss his day-to-day contributions to CHNY and his technical wizardry in managing to make even the most recalcitrant A-V system work at programs, but he is not leaving us completely: he has graciously agreed to maintain editorial duties for *NYFoodStory* from his distant perch (although we may have to send true New York bagels to combat homesickness or he if needs New York comestibles to get him in the proper editorial mindset).

As academic interest in food continues to flourish, CHNY is keeping pace, growing as a venue where scholars and the general public can learn about culinary cultures. This May, CHNY was highlighted in *The New Yorker* magazine for George Solt's popular Ramen program: <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-history-of-the-ramen-noodle>. But more importantly, we are adding to the conversation by supporting new research in the field of culinary history, something made possible for the past three years by the Julia Child Foundation, which has given CHNY \$5,000 to award in the CHNY Scholar's Grants, and I am pleased to report that the JCF has renewed the grant for a fourth year (2015).

Under the terms of the grants, recipients present a paper or other report on some aspect of their supported research to CHNY. On June 9, Jennifer Jensen Wallach, a 2013 grant recipient, presented "Dethroning the Deceitful Pork Chop," to a rapt audience packed with academics and 'civilian' CHNY members at New York University's Department of Food Studies. Among the guests was Jennifer Krauss, the administrator of the JCF, who came away excited by the high level and the importance of the work we support.

continued on page thirteen ►

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

### History from below, through the lens of food

*Ari Ariel*

Food tells us more about society than most objects or ideologies. This claim, which will hardly ruffle any feathers among CHNY members, has only recently been fully acknowledged in the academic world. Food Studies, for years quite marginal, is now emerging as a serious, rapidly expanding discipline. Within the field of history, food is particularly well suited to history from below. Culinary historians are not only interested in the gustatory habits of the rich and powerful. We hope to understand how food and drink impact the daily lives of people within and across strata. Foodways, by their nature, highlight issues of ethnicity, nationalism, race, gender, and class.

The authors in this issue of *NYFoodstory* are all engaged in corrective history. They have, in a variety of ways, reinscribed the absent into the historical record. Larry Spruill tells us the story of the Turner family, a story of "slavery, freedom, faith and food." Rebecca Turner began her life in slavery, obtained her freedom and became an accomplished cook and entrepreneur. Her story is moving, both in what it tells us about momentous historical events like abolition, and in the picture it draws of the mundane lives of African Americans in early 19th-century New York. Using nontraditional sources, like Turner's grocery lists, Spruill has been able to reconstruct her culinary repertoire in the form of a cookbook. More importantly, he has rewritten African Americans into the history of the region, not merely as enslaved people, but as pioneers who played an essential role in the establishment of new towns and the development of their economies.

continued on page thirteen ►

# The original New York foodies

## Jane Nickerson, Cecily Brownstone and James Beard and the making of the New York food community

By Kimberly Wilmot Voss

DURING THE SUMMER OF 1957, *New York Times* food editor Jane Nickerson lifted a glass of Chassagne-Montrachet at restaurant “21” and toasted her departure from the newspaper with her lunch guests, *Gourmet* magazine editor Eileen Gaden and *Gourmet* writer Craig Claiborne. Nickerson announced that she would be leaving on September 1, whether her replacement had been hired or not.<sup>1</sup> Claiborne was ultimately hired to replace her, and his celebrated career would eventually eclipse that of his predecessor. Likewise, legendary food writer James Beard would overshadow his two close friends, Nickerson and Associated Press food editor Cecily Brownstone.

Nickerson and Brownstone were vital cogs in the foundational years of the culinary scene in New York City, but their contributions to that scene have been largely overlooked. Claiborne is often credited with modernizing food journalism, yet Nickerson laid the foundation at the *New York Times* before he ever arrived. Beard’s mark on the culi-



Jane Nickerson

Courtesy of the family of Jane Nickerson Steinberg

nary world stands without question; however, his entry and acceptance into the New York food community was the result of his relationship with Nickerson and Brownstone. The two food editors regularly socialized with Beard and Alexander Steinberg, who would later become

Nickerson’s husband. According to Evan Jones’s biography of Beard, *Epicurean Delight*, the four “probed New York’s ethnic neighborhoods, titillating their palates and venting their curiosity about origins of recipes.”<sup>2</sup>

Nickerson graduated from the all-female Radcliffe College in 1938. The following year, she began her journalism career as an editorial assistant for the *Ladies Home Journal*. She moved on to the *Saturday Evening Post* before moving to New York City in 1942 to become the first food editor at the *New York Times*. During her time at the newspaper, she penned the column, “News of Food,” and covered features

about the food of the day. She guided her readers through the rationing of World War II and the changing food technologies of the time. She reviewed cookbooks and interviewed both home cooks and restaurant chefs. She later said that during her tenure, the eight major newspapers in the

city were all vying for the same stories.<sup>3</sup>

Nickerson married Steinberg in 1950 and by 1957, she was a mother and ready to leave the *Times* and join her husband in Florida where they planned to continue raising their children. Reportedly, she said to Claiborne, “I honestly think the *Times* didn’t believe me when I said I was leaving. People simply don’t leave the *Times*. They stay there until they die or are dismissed.”<sup>4</sup> Editors at the newspaper had interviewed many possible replacements for Nickerson, or as she put it, “anybody who can type with one finger and who had ever scrambled an egg.”<sup>5</sup>

Nickerson was among the first to interview Beard, visiting him in his Twelfth Street home in 1945 when he was building his reputation as a caterer. He offered her a cup of instant coffee, and she asked him questions about appetizers. “Everything about him was unpretentious,” she later recalled.<sup>6</sup> After Beard’s book, *The Fireside Cookbook*, first published in 1949, made him a celebrity, Nickerson declared him to be “a titan of the table art, a leading personality in contemporary cookery on this side of the Atlantic and a man whose vast culinary talents match his heroic proportions.”<sup>7</sup> Nickerson did a great deal of reporting and writing and was an insightful observer of the city’s food scene. By 1949, she wrote, there were more than 21,000 restaurants in New York City, with cuisines as varied as Polish, French, Italian, Chinese, and German. “They serve to the city’s residents and guest foods in so many languages as to rob the city of any one set of distinctive dishes,” she noted.<sup>8</sup> Culinary historian Anne Mendelson examined Nickerson’s work and wrote: “Jane Nickerson’s articles and recipes show her as an observer of wide-ranging curiosity and knowledge, moving with some sensitivity between prosaic ‘service’ information and higher-flying gastronomic matters.”<sup>9</sup> She was also a journalist first. In 2003, former *Times* food journalist Molly O’Neill credited Nickerson with being one of the first food journalists to apply ethics and news values to her craft. According to O’Neill, news was central to the story lines in

continued on page ten ►



The Cecily Brownstone Papers at the Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University

A party on the first-floor terrace of the townhouse that Cecily Brownstone co-owned in Greenwich Village, circa 1940s or ’50s. From left, James Beard, Irma Rombauer, Brownstone and Clementine Paddleford.

# What the peddler ate

## A conversation with historian Hasia Diner

By Ari Ariel

HASIA DINER IS THE PAUL AND SYLVIA STEINBERG PROFESSOR OF AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY AND THE DIRECTOR OF THE GOLDSTEIN-GOREN CENTER FOR AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY. She has published numerous books, bridging the fields of American Jewish history, and Ethnic, Women's, and Immigration Studies. Her book, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002) was nominated for a James Beard Award. Professor Diner recently sat down with me to talk about the transformation of immigrant foodways in the United States, and about her latest project on Jewish peddlers in the New World. Her new book, *Roads Taken: The Great Jewish Migrations to the New World and the Peddlers Who Forged the Way*, will be published by Yale University Press in early 2015.

AA: I think many CHNY members will know you from your book *Hungering for America*, which is about the foodways of Irish, Italian and Jewish immigrants to the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries. Could you tell us a bit more about who immigrated to the U.S. and why?

HD: During the 19th century the United States had the most vibrant economy in the world, and this attracted millions of immigrants, particularly from the 1820s to the 1920s, among them about 30 million Europeans. Many of these immigrants were those that I call "the almost poor." They weren't the poorest people in their communities who probably wouldn't have had the resources to migrate. People who emigrated were worried about hunger, and felt that their economic situation at home was getting worse, and they were willing to take the risk to come to the U.S., where they thought, and this was true, that food existed in greater abun-



Hasia Diner

dance. The idea that immigrants thought that the streets in the United States were paved with gold is a complete myth. They knew that they would have to work hard and might end up working in a coal mine in rural Pennsylvania, but they were willing to do that in order to eat well.

Part of the reason food prices were lower in the U.S. was because of improvements in agricultural and transportation technologies. Things like steamships and the completion of the Erie Canal made movement much easier. Ships were bringing American foodstuffs to Europe. For example, one observer calculated that it was cheaper for a baker in Budapest to make bread from flour that was grown in the United States, processed and transported to Europe on a ship, than to use local wheat. And of course this meant that local farmers had to find a new way to make a living, and often the

way to do this was to migrate. At the same time, the steamships bringing American goods to Europe weren't going to return to the United States empty, so steamship companies had an interest in encouraging immigration, which became an important part of their business.

AA: Did immigrants come to the United States with a concrete sense of what "Italian" or "Jewish" food was?

HD: No, in large part those categories come out of the experience of migration. There is a wonderful anecdote in the memoir of an employee of an Italian olive oil company, who had come to the United States on business. He was walking around New York, on Bleeker Street, and he saw signs for something called an "Italian restaurant" and in his memoir he says he thought it was a joke. He went inside because he said he had to try it. On the menu there were foods like such and such Siciliano (from Sicily), and Milanese (from Milan), and Parmigiano (from Parma), and he says he couldn't understand what they were all doing together in one

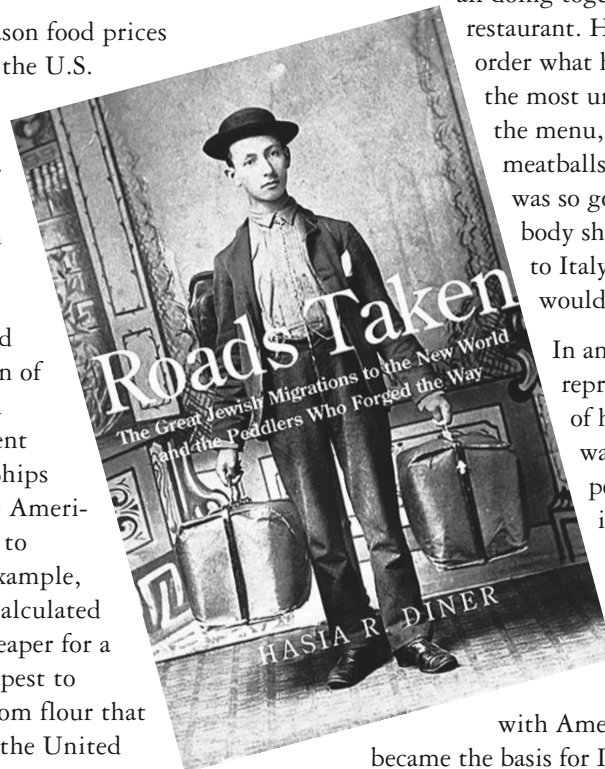
restaurant. He decided to order what he thought was the most unusual thing on the menu, spaghetti and meatballs. And he said it was so good that somebody should send it back to Italy; people in Italy would love it too.

In another sense, what represented the food of home for them was what rich people had eaten in their places of origin. And these foods became Italian foods and then, combined

with American abundance,

became the basis for Italian-American cuisine.

For Jews, they too came to the United States with an idea of what rich people ate and what was holiday food. There



was a certain Eastern European commonality, but also lots of regional variation. For example what goes into gefilte fish—they're all eating gefilte fish, other than the Romanians. All the Ashkenazim are eating gefilte fish but there is a geographic line in Eastern Europe and on one side of the line, the farther west one goes, it's made with sugar and is sweet, and in the east it is savory. Or there is a meat dish called *russel fleisch*—should it be made with beets or no beets? So there are regional variations, but in some ways Eastern European Jews were much more geographically mobile within Eastern Europe than Italians. A Sicilian village dweller may never have left his village, never trusted anybody who didn't live in that village, and probably married someone from inside the village, whereas Jews had many reasons to go beyond their towns, both men and women. For example, I read the memoir of a man who went to Slonim [now a city in Belarus] as a boy to study in the yeshiva. He wrote about it as a miserable town that he hated, but one thing he really liked was a phenomenal pudding made from rice, rose water and oil, called *gutman*. In his memoir he says that since then he's always wanted to find somebody who could make *gutman* for him.

**AA: Rose water is not an ingredient I would expect to find in Eastern Europe.**

**HD:** No, but the rich did have a certain amount of access to imported goods and presumably rose water was one of them. So, just using the experience of yeshiva students as an example, they had something called *essen teg*, or eating days. Families in town were expected to feed the yeshiva students. And the boys in the yeshiva talked a lot about which families were the nicest, who let you eat with the family as opposed to in the kitchen, who gave you leftovers. Of course, only the rich families in town could afford to feed yeshiva students. They were gaining the mitzvah of studying by feeding the students. So the students got to try rose water or some other imported food that they would have never had if they hadn't been in this educational elite and hadn't gone to

the yeshiva. This meant that a young man from one region got exposed to foods, both in terms of class and geography, that he wouldn't have if he had stayed at home.

"People who emigrated were worried about hunger, and felt that their economic situation at home was getting worse, and they were willing to take the risk to come to the U.S., where ... food existed in greater abundance. The idea that immigrants thought that the streets in the United States were paved with gold is a complete myth. They knew that they would have to work hard and might end up working in a coal mine... but they were willing to do that in order to eat well.

**AA:** So in Europe, foodways had already been altered by migration. How did this process develop with migration to the United States?

**HD:** The overwhelming characteristic of America was that food was cheap and varied. Lots of food was available at very low cost, meat in particular. Commentators had noted this since the colonial period—one called Americans a "flesh-consuming people." They were eating meat all the time, a couple of times a day. On the other hand, in Italy, it was described that people ate meat on Christmas, Easter and on their towns' saint's day, and if they found a dead animal, the landowner might allow them to cart it off, hack it up and cook it. For Jews, who had greater exposure to meat, it was usually the Friday night chicken. For many Jews this was something they got through charity, and they got one chicken for a huge family. The idea that in America you could eat chicken every night and have meat, maybe not the best cut, but you could have meat every day, three times a

day, was amazing. That was just an enormous change, and the immigrants began to incorporate meat into dishes that wouldn't have included meat before; hence the spaghetti and meatballs. Meat became thoroughly essential—so meat on pizza, meat on lasagna. I've seen Italian community cookbooks from the 1920s that include a recipe for something called "Italian steak"—it was obviously just steak—it is dressed in oregano and olive oil before it gets grilled, or "Italian meatloaf," which I think is still on menus—again, it has some herbs in it, and tomato sauce. They would have never seen steak or meatloaf before, but, unlike Jews, who reveled in things called American, for the Italians this was their chance to be Italian. For the immigrants from Sicily or Apulia or other regions, this was their chance to be Italian by eating meat, but they ate it, incorporating it into the dishes of the well-off folks in their places of origin.

**AA:** Your new book, *Roads Taken*, is about Jewish peddlers in the United States?

**HD:** Right, although it's actually global. I look at all the New World places to which the peddlers went, although the United States was the most important destination statistically. During that great Jewish migration about 85 to 90 percent of the immigrants came to the United States. The other destinations—South Africa, or Australia or the British Isles—are interesting but statistically not as important. I'm looking at the peddlers that are out on the road. Five days a week they're out in the countryside selling to customers and they only return to the big cities or town on the weekends, to what is sort of the nucleus of Jewish life.

**AA:** When they're peddling, they're largely selling to non-Jewish customers?

**HD:** One hundred percent, so the question is not only what did they sell and how did they speak to these people, but where did they sleep and what did they eat? They tried to always sleep in

this time. The inclusion of school lunch workers within District Council 37, better known as DC37, an umbrella union that represented a wide variety of public service positions, presented challenges when they sought a redress of grievances. Out of a total union roll of approximately 5,000 school lunch workers, only 151 filed written grievances or expressed documented displeasure in their jobs in the four-year period between 1958 and 1962.<sup>1</sup> Who were these workers and what issues provoked their complaints?

The history of women employed to serve food in New York City schools dates to the Progressive Era. School lunch programs first appeared as a response to both the growing problem of poverty and an increased academic interest in food reform. In January of 1919, the Board of Education allocated \$50,000 (over \$700,000 in today's market) to study the feasibility of implementing a citywide, non-profit school lunch program. One year later the board allocated an additional \$50,000 and began lunch service at selected schools in March 1920. The program targeted poor immigrant neighborhoods with large numbers of children suffering from malnutrition, with the higher aim of not only preventing starvation, but also of imparting modern American food knowledge to children and their parents.

On the national level, health professionals in the Bureau of Home Economics and the National PTA petitioned Congress for many years to establish a national school lunch program with the goal of providing all children, and especially the needy, the guarantee of at least



A photo that illustrated an article by David McLane about school lunch, which appeared in the New York Sunday News in December 1966.

one healthy meal per day. Their efforts finally met with success in 1946. Concerns about the future of the nation's health, combined with an immense post-war agricultural commodity surplus ultimately convinced legislators to establish the National School Lunch Program.

In New York City, funding from the National School Lunch Program allowed the Board of Education to greatly expand its lunch services. As the program expanded and bureaucracy succeeded its original charitable intentions, over 650 school lunch workers formed School Lunch Employees Union Local 1. This union negotiated a verbal commitment for a 9 percent pay raise for hourly workers in June 1947. When the Board of Education submitted the official budget in July without including the increase, 500 school food workers picketed the Board of Education offices. This would be the only direct action ever taken by school lunch employees.<sup>2</sup> After a series of changes in union organization over the next 10 years, School Lunch Employees Local Union 1 became School Lunch Workers Local 372 and in 1955, the rapidly expanding DC37 absorbed the school lunch employees union into AFSCME (American Federation of State,

County and Municipal Employees), an affiliate of the AFL-CIO. The Board of Education officially recognized the renamed Local 372 as the school lunch workers union at this time and entered into contract negotiations with them at one- to two-year intervals. Dietitians and cafeteria managers affiliated with a different union, Teamsters Local 832. Although Local 832 repeatedly attempted to poach school lunch workers throughout the postwar period, the school lunch aides remained loyal to Local 372.

New York City's school cafeteria workers were fairly amenable to letting their union leaders take the lead when it came to agitating for rights: only 5 percent of the workforce appealed to the union for help in any given year during the 1950s and '60s. School lunch workers often found their needs subjugated to those of other groups perceived by administrators and the public as more important, such as teachers. In May 1962, DC37 Vice President Harry Gray ceded to the requests of Board of Education officials to postpone annual contract renegotiations for lunch workers, "because of the repeated crises affecting the teachers, and in sympathy with the fact that the Board could only deal with

*Shayne Leslie Figueroa is a doctoral fellow in the Food Studies program at New York University. Her current research focuses on food and families during the postwar period in America. Shayne's dissertation is a social history of the National School Lunch Program in New York City, with a focus on the construction of children as consumers.*

so much at one time.”<sup>3</sup> The union finally took action on the school lunch workers behalf in November 1963, when President Jerry Wurf threatened a strike if the much-delayed negotiations did not take place immediately. A November 8, 1963 internal Board of Education memo indicates that President Max J. Rubin wanted the bargaining dealt with “before it develops into a rhubarb.”<sup>4</sup> Collective bargaining on behalf of school lunch workers occurred that winter.

Union members worked in a variety of different foodservice environments throughout the five boroughs of New York City. The Board of Education’s Central Kitchen facility in Long Island City serviced all elementary school lunchrooms. Workers in the Central Kitchen prepared sandwiches, soup and dessert items such as fruit cups or cookies. Some popular sandwich fillings of this time included peanut butter, egg salad, cheese, cold baked beans and hot-dogs. Trucks then delivered the lunches to over 600 schools. Junior high schools that did not have their own kitchen facilities also received meals from the Central Kitchen. High schools operated as autonomous units, since many had on-site kitchen facilities. In 1967 it was estimated that students ate over 74 million school lunches over the course of the academic year. School lunch helpers and aides in the lunchrooms and cafeterias were responsible for receiving foods, assisting in prepping raw materials if there was an on-site kitchen, preparing the lunch counter, cooking food, serving it to students and faculty, cleaning up their workspaces, running the cash registers and meeting all federal health and safety food-service guidelines. All employees were expected to work efficiently within the system to guarantee that all children received a nutritious lunch, the founding principle of the National School Lunch Program.

School lunch helpers and school lunch aides working in the cafeterias were often neighborhood women. The poor grammar exhibited in the grievances indicates a low educational level and photographs of the Central Kitchen staff reveal that it was primarily black women and men working for the Bureau of Lunches. These women reported to white cafeteria managers, professional women with degrees in dietetics, nutrition or domestic science.

Cafeteria and school-related food-

service work offered dietitians and nutritionists an opportunity to pursue careers that served the public interest while embracing acceptable images of femininity. As nutritionists and dietitians, they promoted healthy eating and nutritional values to younger generations. Their bachelor’s and master’s degrees indicated that they were intellectually adept in science and had taken advantage of opportunities to advance their education past high school. The school cafeterias and lunch program allowed these smart women to express their intellect on a daily basis without challenging the gender status quo. In post-war America, a woman’s place was in the kitchen, and these professional women supported that notion because it was in their interest: they could pursue legitimate careers while still appeasing societal norms.

School lunch workers often found their needs subjugated to those of other groups perceived by administrators and the public as more important, such as teachers.

Men also worked in foodservice administration, but they were the exception to the rule. When male managers show up in the Local 372 grievance files, they are often summarily dismissive of the female workers and their culinary skill-sets. A dietitian by the name of Mr. Silverburg demoted Margaret Calliste from her temporary position as a cook to a school lunch helper in August 1958. Calliste sought help from her union representative for what she viewed as an unjust and unfair action. She complained that Silverburg criticized her cooking when “all he’d ever eaten out of my kitchen was a cheese sandwich.”<sup>5</sup> It’s possible that Silverburg might have demoted Calliste because her food did not meet his standards, or, judging by the seemingly lax personnel practices of the time and the low status of foodservice workers, it could have been because he wanted to bring in a different cook and did not fear any repercussions from the school’s male principal or the larger school bureaucracy.

Elsie Strahan, the supervisor of junior high school lunches for the city, reappears regularly in the grievance files and she stands out as a strong female figure in the postwar expansion of New York City’s school lunch system. She served as the de-facto chief nutritionist for the Board of Education from 1955 through 1965. Strahan’s correspondence reveals a caustic, no-nonsense approach to the job that used claims of prioritizing service to schoolchildren to justify the dismissal of worker complaints. “We are in the school to feed the children, not to appease the workers,” proclaimed one particularly succinct line from a December 1959 letter to DC 37 Vice President Gray.<sup>6</sup> Strahan viewed the union as another part of the school bureaucracy to be dealt with, and expected union leaders to also prioritize a well-run system over the complaints of a few women.

Strahan remained consistent throughout her career in her lack of sympathy for worker grievances. For example, a similar epistle arrived in Miss Beatrice Hayes’s mailbox in mid-October 1962. This school lunch worker in Queens had been reported several times by her manager for poor attitude and lack of cooperation. It is unclear how Local 372 received a copy of the letter, but neither the union representative at P.S. 74 nor any executive board members were copied on the original. Strahan’s stern tone in the letter conveys a great deal about her relationship with the rank-and-file lunch workers. She treated them as interchangeable cogs in the school lunch program machine, there to perform their work in a pleasant manner or else suffer the threat of dismissal. And they certainly did not need coffee breaks:

*“...I take it for granted that you want to work at 74. I take it for granted that you are interested in your work and I expect you to prove this to your manager.*

*“There are no coffee breaks for hourly workers and I am very much surprised to think that you, coming in at 9:30 in the morning, find it necessary to have a cup of coffee before the serving of school lunches. If coffee is essential for your good health I suggest that you find a job where coffee breaks are a part of the routine.”<sup>7</sup>*

There are no responses or further notes on either of the cases, which leaves the possibility that the officers of Local 372 could have sided with Strahan against the workers. The Staff Relations Plan of the Board of Education stated that a worker had the right to representation at any stage in the complaint procedures, and grievance files from 1958 through 1962 indicate that workers reached out to the union in the case of more personal matters only after first trying to work the situation out on their own with direct supervisors and Strahan.

While Strahan's written record portrayed her as a tough, no-nonsense

Most of the grievances on file with the union are stand-alone incidents, but the record also includes the story of one worker who submitted a series of letters between 1957 and 1961. The case of Mary Wise demonstrates how many women workers solved their own problems and only sought union help when their situations escalated beyond their control. Her neighborhood of St. Albans straddled the border between Queens and Long Island, and from 1956 to 1964 experienced a rapid change in demographics, from a mix of ethnic whites—Italians, Jews, Armenians and Portuguese—to upwardly mobile and

successful blacks who left Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant for the “suburbs” of southeast Queens. Biographical comments by Wise in these letters seem to indicate that she was a part of this migration.

Wise began working in 1955 as a school lunch helper at J.H.S. 142 in the

Cafeteria and school-related foodservice work offered dietitians and nutritionists an opportunity to pursue careers that served the public interest while embracing acceptable images of femininity.

Jamaica section of Queens. At the beginning of the 1956 school year, she verbally expressed concerns about her three-bus commute to her on-site supervisor, Mrs. Ford. The dietitian spoke with another supervisor and they both advised Wise to contact Mrs. Bleier at the Board of Education for a transfer to her local school, J.H.S. 59. This was a good-willed decision on the part of the managers and Wise referenced them and her subsequent supervisor in a later letter, stating, “I am mentioning all these dietitians and supervisors to prove that previously I have not had any difficulties of any kind with my immediate



Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection

The school cafeteria of Public School 220 in Forest Hills, Queens, September 1956.

administrator, one grievance letter suggests that she occasionally participated in a bit of the drama herself. In February 1961, cook Evalyn Carter wrote Strahan about a recent demotion and transfer that added over an hour to her commute time. The missive, however, reads as an appeal to a former confidante, referencing an earlier “turkey incident” and previous problems at two different schools. Strahan's misanthropic response only exacerbated the situation. She told Carter earlier that she had been transferred because of “lack of harmony” and that “three enemies” resulted in her probation. While there is no resolution to this grievance on record, the case demonstrates that even the strictest administrators could sometimes allow workplace dynamics and individual personalities to impact their work decisions.

page eight



Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection

A window connected the cafeteria and the kitchen at Public School 220 in Forest Hills, Queens, September 1956.

supervisors.”<sup>8</sup> In May 1957 she was asked to apply for the cook position in J.H.S. 59 and was subsequently promoted to this job. In September 1958, a new dietitian arrived at the school, and their problems started about a year later. Wise wrote to Strahan in February 1960 to express her concerns about the deteriorating workplace environment:

*“When Mrs. Brown was hired we had a very harmonious relationship, both on and off the job. This relationship has gradually deteriorated into a constant petty bickering due to the oppressive attitude assumed by this dietitian. Whatever I do seems to start a discussion. I am constantly on edge trying to cooperate in every manner possible.*

*“I am also aware of the fact that Mrs. Brown is the dietitian and I am the cook; therefore the tendency is to regard her views on this situation in a better light than mine.”<sup>9</sup>*

Wise copied a Mrs. Whalen, assistant manager in the Bureau of School Lunches, on this grievance letter, but not Gray or anyone else in Local 372. This omission was probably made either because she trusted the Board of Education to resolve the matter, or because she did not feel that the situation had reached the level where it warranted union involvement.

The Board of Education attempted to resolve the dispute by scheduling regular meetings between Wise, Brown and mid-level Bureau of Lunches supervisors. This worked for a while, but in February 1961 Wise reported that Brown had once again created a hostile work environment as, “she emphatically stated that she, Millie Brown, is the boss of that kitchen, that she does not ‘give a dam’ [sic] about what anyone else says—she will run the job the way she sees fit.”<sup>10</sup> At this point, instead of interviewing other kitchen staff to verify Wise’s reports and taking disciplinary action against Brown, Strahan told Wise that if she was unhappy at J.H.S. 59 she could be transferred to another school. Most workers who filed grievances with the union requested such a transfer, but Wise preferred to stay in her local school and continue to fight. It was at this time that she finally contacted Local 372 for assistance.

Wise spoke to Gray via phone and forwarded him copies of her earlier cor-



District Council Vice President Harry Gray addresses union members.

respondence with Bleier, Whalen and Strahan. She reiterated in the cover letter her belief that Brown had “successfully instilled fear in all the other ladies.” This is a recurring theme in

... I take it for granted that you want to work at [P.S.] 74. I take it for granted that you are interested in your work and I expect you to prove this to your manager. There are no coffee breaks for hourly workers and I am very much surprised to think that you, coming in at 9:30 in the morning, find it necessary to have a cup of coffee before the serving of school lunches. If coffee is essential for your good health I suggest that you find a job where coffee breaks are a part of the routine.

– Elsie Strahan, supervisor, junior high school lunches

many of the grievances, that of one school lunch aide standing up to an unfair supervisor when fellow workers fail to take action. Immediately after her conversation with Gray, Wise learned that Brown would be leaving

her position at the end of the school year because she was pregnant and chose to become a full-time homemaker, an unexpected but welcome resolution to the workplace problem.

Between 1957 and 1962, Local 372 won the school lunch aides two pay increases and improvements to their benefits packages, but it demonstrated a benign paternalism toward workers engaged in disputes. Female union members frequently tried to navigate the Board of Education complaint procedure bureaucracy on their own, unsure of the efficacy or advocacy of the union when it came to help with interpersonal drama on the job. In the postwar period, a woman’s place was commonly understood to be within the home; thus these women did not want to risk their positions as respectable wage earners by voicing too many complaints. When they did submit grievances to Local 372, their emotional appeals often failed to elicit proactive responses from the union leadership. Instead, the school lunch aides found themselves caught between a city bureaucracy that privileged the opinions of managers over those of workers and a union that focused the majority of its efforts on other, more visible government employees. Food preparation and distribution in schools continued to be viewed as women’s work through the late 1970s, and the union consistently deferred to the Board of Education’s School Lunch Bureau in matters involving grievances by school lunch workers.

continued on page fifteen ►

the vast majority the *Times*' food stories in the Nickerson years.<sup>10</sup>

When Nickerson announced that she was leaving the *Times*, Beard was particularly saddened by what her absence could mean to food coverage in New York. Her popularity was punctuated by the number of farewell parties held in her honor, as Beard wrote in a letter to food writer Helen Evans Brown: "Going to four parties for Jane this week. She leaves next week for Florida, and how we hate to see her go. She has done more for dignified food coverage than anyone. Everyone will miss her keenly, and I more than most, for she was a good friend and a most amusing person always."<sup>11</sup>

Initially the editors were more interested in hiring someone with a background in test kitchens than in the "rarefied atmosphere of a publication like *Gourmet*," according to a *New York Times* memo.<sup>12</sup> Nickerson and Beard had hoped that Brown would become the second food editor at the *New York Times*. When the position went to Claiborne, they publicly supported the decision. Privately, however, Beard wrote to Brown that he and Nickerson had agreed that she was the better choice, "But that is in the family and never breathe it."<sup>13</sup>

Nickerson and Brownstone developed a long personal friendship. They met in New York City in the 1940s when Nickerson published a profile

about Brownstone, who had worked in magazines before joining the wire service. "Our friendship flowered in Denmark during an assignment," Nickerson wrote. "Her magical sense of humor charmed me in the several days we sampled Danish cheeses, hams, beers, Cherry Herring and aquavit."<sup>14</sup>

Nickerson later introduced Beard to Brownstone and the two would become such good friends that they spoke on the phone daily. Brownstone covered food for the Associated Press from 1947 until she retired in 1986. She wrote two columns and published five recipes a week for the national wire service, for an estimated 14,200 articles during her career. Nickerson wrote that Brownstone's recipes were "unusual, appetizing and accurate down to the last one-eighth of a teaspoon of salt."<sup>15</sup> Brownstone's success, according to Nickerson, "derived, in my view, from her sensitivity to readers' tastes and her insistence that recipes give high quality, appealing results."<sup>16</sup>

Beard described several meals with Brownstone in his letters to Brown, who was best known for authoring the 1952 *The West Coast Cook Book*. In a 1954 letter, he detailed the steak he cooked for Brownstone during a meal they shared in her sister's garden apartment. Brownstone prepared a fried onion dish that they named "Cecily's Onions."<sup>17</sup> He included the recipe in the letter to Brown. The following year Beard wrote, "We had a delightful dinner at Cecily's. She made Country Captain but differently from her usual recipe. We all liked it very much."<sup>18</sup>

Decades later, in the *Times*, Molly O'Neill described Brownstone as the "Curator of Country Captain Chicken"<sup>19</sup> and "a one-woman preservation society for this particular version of curried chicken." In an essay about the New York City food establishment in her book, *Wallflower at the Orgy*, Nora Ephron pondered that the beginning of the foodie movement may have been in the 1950s when cooking with curry became popular. She wrote that historical explanations of the rise of the food

establishment rarely begin with curry. Instead, historians tend to describe the return of soldiers from World War II, the increase in post-war travel, and the decline in domestic help. "This background is well and good, but it leaves

... Brownstone's recipes were "unusual, appetizing and accurate down to the last one-eighth of a teaspoon of salt." Brownstone's success, according to Nickerson, "was derived, in my view, from her sensitivity to readers' tastes and her insistence that recipes give highly appealing results."

out the curry development," Ephron wrote.<sup>20</sup> In his book, *The United States of Arugula*, David Kamp asserted that the curry craze was "instigated, or at least stoked" by Brownstone's recipe for Country Captain Chicken, which included curry.<sup>21</sup>

Brownstone introduced the New York food community to Irma S. Rombauer, author of *The Joy of Cooking*. The success of the classic cookbook was in part a result of the positive reviews written by newspaper food editors. At the time of the book's publication Brownstone was a food editor at *Parents* magazine. She traveled to St. Louis to meet Rombauer. As they sat on a bench at the St. Louis Zoo, Brownstone asked the cookbook author, "Did you vote for Roosevelt?" The answer was "yes" and the two fans of the New Deal became friends for life.<sup>22</sup> Brownstone said she was one of the few editors to interview Rombauer because the cookbook author would not, at first, come to New York. In later years, Brownstone would finally get the chance to introduce Rombauer to the "foodie community in New York,"<sup>23</sup> and she would write the foreword for the fiftieth-anniversary edition of the cookbook, describing Rombauer

*Kimberly Wilmot Voss, PhD, is an associate professor of journalism at the University of Central Florida and the area coordinator of the journalism program. She is the author of The Food Section: Newspaper Women and the Culinary Community (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014) and a co-author of Mad Men & Working Women: Feminist Perspectives on Historical Power, Resistance and Otherness (Peter Lang, 2014). She earned a Scholar's Grant from the Greater Midwest Foodways Alliance in collaboration with Culinary Historians of Chicago in 2013. She received the 2014 Carol DeMasters Service to Journalism Award from the Association of Food Journalists. She blogs at WomensPageHistory.*

as a “great and good friend.”<sup>24</sup>

*The Joy of Cooking* was written in a conversational tone and mixed simple dishes with complex cuisine. *Chicago Tribune* food editor Ruth Ellen Church wrote: “If this book has too wide a circulation, there will be little for us food editors to do.”<sup>25</sup> Nickerson also posi-

Former *Times* food journalist Molly O’Neill credited Nickerson with being one of the first food journalists to apply ethics and news values to her craft. News, O’Neill wrote, was central to the story lines in the vast majority the *Times*’ food stories in the Nickerson years.

tively reviewed the 1951 edition of *The Joy of Cooking* for the *New York Times*, explaining that it was a time when there were fewer servants and thus cooking was encouraged by being a “joy” to do.<sup>26</sup>

Brownstone hosted a party in her home for Rombauer when the 1951 edition of the cookbook was published, and a photo from the event, found in her papers at the Fales Library & Special Collections at New York University, shows well-dressed women gathered on a garden balcony. Nickerson was fond of that 1951 edition, writing that the book was a classic with a personality: “Mrs. Rombauer summed up her lively, intelligent approach to the table arts as the New Deal of the American household.”<sup>27</sup> Anne Mendelson, who chronicled the story behind *The Joy of Cooking* in her book, *Stand Facing the Stove*, wrote: “The cachet of the *New York Times* food coverage under Miss Nickerson was already considerable.” Thus, her endorsement of the book meant “an authoritative announcement that *The Joy of Cooking* could stand as the American cookbook of its era.”<sup>28</sup>

It is worth mentioning that Clementine Paddleford was also an occasional visitor



Courtesy of the James Beard Foundation

James Beard, circa 1940s or '50s.

to the fledgling culinary group. Paddleford was reviewing restaurants for the *New York Herald Tribune* and the newspaper insert *This Week* from the 1940s through the 1960s when her newspaper folded.<sup>29</sup> In the book *Dining Out*, about restaurant reviewing, Gael Greene stated, “Clementine Paddleford was writing about restaurants before me. Food was considered women’s work.”<sup>30</sup> Paddleford wrote about the history of Waldorf Salad and Lindy’s Cheesecake in her city. Often in her

Nickerson was among the first to interview Beard, visiting him in his Twelfth Street home in 1945 when he was building his reputation as a caterer. He offered her a cup of instant coffee, and she asked him questions about appetizers. “Everything about him was unpretentious,” she later recalled.

own plane, she flew to different cities to write about home cooks and restaurants. While in Milwaukee, she wrote about the city’s famed Mader’s restaurant, which had been serving German food since 1903. She described the history of the restaurant and included recipes for Sauerbraten, potato dumplings, and cheese torte.<sup>31</sup>

In 1964, the *New York Herald Tribune* published a collection of columns from its top writers, including Paddleford, who noted that “restaurants are my beat.”

continued on following page ►



Cecily Brownstone's photo on the jacket of *Cecily Brownstone's Associated Press Cookbook*, published in 1972.

Of the 18,000 eateries in the city, she detailed her one hundred favorites. Rather than being negative about a restaurant's failings, she focused on what was best. In the French category, she recommended Café Argenteuil, writing, "My favorite appetizer there is Baked Clams done with garlic and herbs, with a dash of lemon and Pernod." She wrote that at Le Veau d'Or, 90 percent of the customers spoke French. She gave three stars to Italian Pavilion. Of Michael's Pub, she wrote, "When a pub becomes famous in New York City you can bet your buttons it's quite a place." Rather than being anonymous, she went into the kitchen to speak with the chef. At Karachi Restaurant, she described the chef bending over his curry pots.<sup>32</sup>

In the years after Nickerson left the *New York Times*, Beard and Brownstone stayed in contact, and Brownstone often visited Nickerson in Central Florida. After a few years off to raise her four children, Nickerson became the food editor at the *Ledger* in Lakeland, Florida, in 1973 and remained in the job until 1988. It was a *New York Times*-owned newspaper at the time. When Brownstone retired from the Associated Press in 1986, Nickerson wrote about it. Brownstone continued to socialize with Beard, including spending the holidays

with him. Her association with him has led her to be described as "the ad hoc matriarch of James Beard's culinary salon"<sup>33</sup> and a "cuisine maven."<sup>34</sup> Brownstone amassed a collection of some 8,000 cookbooks during her career, most of which she donated to New York University in 2002. According to the Marvin Taylor, the head of the Fales Special Collections at NYU, "Even if we had all the time and money in the world, we couldn't reassemble a collection this size and scarcity."<sup>35</sup>

Brownstone died in 2005 at age 96. Nickerson died in 2000 at age 83. Beard and Claiborne certainly have hammered out their rightful histories in the establishment of the New York City food community. But equally as important are those of Nickerson and Brownstone. According to Claiborne in his memoir, *A Feast Made for Laughter*, Nickerson "was, to my

Nickerson and Brownstone were vital cogs in the foundational years of the culinary scene in New York City, but their contributions to that scene have been largely overlooked.

mind, the most inventive and diligent food writer in Manhattan. What she did not know she researched with great gravity and concern."<sup>36</sup> As noted by Kamp in his recent take on food in America, "Though Beard still did not reach as many readers as newspaper columnists like Brownstone ... and Nickerson, he eclipsed them in fame through force of personality."<sup>37</sup> Personalities and fame notwithstanding, the two women belong in any conversation about the role of writers in American food culture.

\* \* \*

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Craig Claiborne, *A Feast Made for Laughter* (New York, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1982) p. 125.

<sup>2</sup>Evan Jones, *Epicurean Delight* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1992), p. 170.

<sup>3</sup>"Food Columnist Reveals Recipes for Exciting Career," *Ocala (FL) Star-Banner*, April 28, 1974.

<sup>4</sup>Craig Claiborne, *A Feast Made for Laughter*, p. 122.

<sup>5</sup>Claiborne, *A Feast Made*, pp. 122-3.

<sup>6</sup>Jones, *Epicurean Delight*, p. 136.

<sup>7</sup>Jones, *Epicurean Delight*, p. 149.

<sup>8</sup>Marian Tracy, ed., *Coast to Coast Cookery* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1952), p. 143.

<sup>9</sup>Anne Mendelson, "Review of Craig Claiborne's Revised New York Times Cookbook," *Journal of Gastronomy*, 1990, p.83.

<sup>10</sup>Molly O'Neill, "Food Porn," *Columbia Journalism Review*, September/October 2003, p. 38.

<sup>11</sup>James Beard letter to Helen Evans Brown, September 16, 1957. John Ferrone, ed., *Love and Kisses and a Halo of Truffles* (New York, NY: Arcade Publishing, 1994), p. 192.

<sup>12</sup>Arthur Hays Sulzberger, Box 169, Food News folder. *New York Times* Company Records. Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

<sup>13</sup>Beard to Brown, September 1957. Ferrone, *Love and Kisses*, p. 190.

<sup>14</sup>Jane Nickerson, "Countless Read Her," *Lakeland Ledger*, June 12, 1994.

<sup>15</sup>Nickerson, "Countless Read Her."

<sup>16</sup>Nickerson, "Countless Read Her."

<sup>17</sup>Beard to Brown, August 13, 1954. Ferrone, *Love and Kisses*, p. 60.

<sup>18</sup>Beard to Brown, November 1, 1955. Ferrone, *Love and Kisses*, p. 130.

<sup>19</sup>Molly O'Neill, "Long Ago Smitten, She Remains True to the Country Captain," *The New York Times*, April 17, 1991.

<sup>20</sup>Nora Ephron, "Food Establishment," *Wallflower at the Orgy* (New York: Bantam Books, 2007), pp. 5-6.

<sup>21</sup>David Kamp, *The United States of Arugula: How We Became a Gourmet Nation* (New York: Broadway Books, 2006), p. 69.

<sup>22</sup>Anne Mendelson, *Stand Facing the Stove: The Lives of Irma S. Rombauer and Marion Rombauer Becker* (New York: Scribner, 2003), p. 175.

<sup>23</sup>Elizabeth S. Demers, "Irma Rombauer and Marion Rombauer Becker," *Icons of American Cooking*, p. 234.

<sup>24</sup>Cecily Brownstone, *Cecily Brownstone's Associated Press* (New York: David McKay, 1972), p. x.

<sup>25</sup>Mendelson, *Stand Facing the Stove*, p. 160.

<sup>26</sup>Jane Nickerson, "They Wanted to Cook Like Mother," *New York Times*, August 12, 1951.

<sup>27</sup>Nickerson, "They Wanted to Cook."

<sup>28</sup>Mendelson, *Stand Facing the Stove*, p. 221.

<sup>29</sup>Kelly Alexander and Cynthia Harris, *Hometown Appetites: The Story of Clementine Paddleford, the Forgotten Food Writer Who Chronicled How America Ate* (New York: Gotham Press, 2008)

<sup>30</sup>Andrew Dornenburg and Karen Page, *Dining Out* (New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1998) p. 8.

<sup>31</sup>Clementine Paddleford, *How America Eats* (New York: Scribner, 1960), 346-47.

<sup>32</sup>Clementine Paddleford, "Gourmets' Choice," in *New York, New York* (New York: Delta Books, 1964), pp. 147-88.

<sup>33</sup>Stephen Miller, "Cecily Brownstone, 96, Editor, Downtown Food Diva," *New York Sun*, September 7, 2005.

<sup>34</sup>Associated Press, "Food writer Cecily Brownstone," *Washington Post*, September 5, 2005.

<sup>35</sup>"Major Collection in Food Studies Acquired," *Progressions: New York University Libraries Newsletter*, Fall 2002, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup>Claiborne, *A Feast Made*, p. 122.

<sup>37</sup>Kamp, *The United States of Arugula*, p. 61. 🍏

Further evidence is in this issue of *NYFoodStory*, which contains an essay by Professor Lawrence Spruill, a recipient of a Scholar's Grant in 2012.

Looking to future scholarship, CHNY received 16 proposals for the 2014 Scholar's Grants, covering a diverse range of topics and media, from biographical investigations, oral histories, a new food and culture journal, documentary film-making, as well as more traditional archival studies and field research. It was a rich and fascinating array, and the five anonymous reviewers awarded Dr. Joy Fraser, a professor of English at George Mason University, a grant of \$3,500 for "Honest Poverty vs. Foreign Fakery: Popular Histories of Haggis, and a Culinary Historical Corrective." She called haggis "a contested cultural signifier of Scottishness . . . and explores how the dish became embroiled in a transnational debate [versus England] about what it means to be Scottish. . . ." She deftly wove together questions of national identity, class and economic status, tracing changes in the dish of haggis itself from elegant luxury in 17th century England, made with butter, cream and breadcrumbs, to the coarser oatmeal-

offal pudding we associate with the dish today, all the while noting the Scots' reputation for frugality. Dr. Fraser will use the funds for archival research in Scotland, and we found her beautifully written proposal particularly resonant

We were particularly thrilled that the grant can support both scholarship and positively impact a living community.

given the recent devolution fight.

The second recipient (\$1,500) was Scott Alves Barton, a doctoral candidate in NYU's Food Studies program. Barton's project, "Feeding the Gods," promises a fascinating ethnographic look into Afro-Brazilian street food traditions, particularly the palm oil (*dendê*) to fry fritters. Barton notes that the vendors (*the baianas de Acarajé*) traditionally have been practitioners of *Candomblé*, and that *dendê* is essential in *Candomblé* worship, but that the vendors now seem to be Evangelical Christians. Barton's doctoral dissertation explores the themes

of "self-determination, heritage building, and resistance to racial oppression. Evangelical dogma implies that the inclusion of palm oil renders all regional recipes into sacred dishes worthy of boycotting." Barton will use the funds to work with local Brazilian organizations to map identity markers of the vendors. This demographic work will enable groups representing the *baianas de Acarajé* to advocate for better health care and other human services. We were particularly thrilled that the grant can support both scholarship and positively impact a living community.

We are also profoundly grateful to our newest corporate member, The History Channel, which has generously supported CHNY with a \$5,000 grant that we are using to upgrade our website and critical membership software. Once these upgrades are completed, we will be able to include much more information about our programs, have an opt-in, searchable database to help find experts in different areas, and allow us to post images from our programs.

We look forward to continuing to improve our work and invite feedback from our membership. Write to us at [contact@culinaryhistoriansny.org](mailto:contact@culinaryhistoriansny.org). ☺

## Letter from the Editor continued from page two

In the latter half of the 19th century, factors including the extension of railroad lines, the impact of immigrant labor, urbanization and suburbanization transformed Eastchester, New York, in ways that obscured the role of the Turners in the town's formative era. These phenomena were not, of course, unique to New York. They were global transformations that provoked migration throughout the world. In my interview with Hasia Diner, we talk at length about European immigration to the United States, changes in foodways, and questions of identity. Spruill and Diner's stories may, in fact, be linked. Diner's peddlers might have traveled to Eastchester. Professor Diner rejects a static notion of authenticity, instead highlighting the role of migration to the U.S. in the development of Italian and Jewish identities. Class relations in Europe, expectations of their new lives in the U.S., and interactions with others, led immigrants to negotiate their identities and to alter their foodways in diverse ways, sometimes stressing assimilation and other times continuity.

Shayne Figueroa's article is, likewise, a history from below. Focusing on lunchroom workers in the New York City public school system, she paints a multidimensional picture of race and gender relations in organized labor and government bureaucracy in the late 1950s and early 1960s. She asks how the mostly African American women and men who worked in these lunchrooms interacted with the mostly white female dietitians and nutritionists who supervised their work. These white women, for whom the school lunch program was an opportunity to further their careers in a way that was in accord with acceptable images of femininity, in turn had to negotiate their positions with the mostly male administrations of the Union and the Board of Education.

Both in lunchrooms and in the greater New York City food world, the foundational role of women has been obscured. Kimberly Voss argues that while James Beard and Craig Claiborne have been rightfully recognized for establishing New York as an international culinary center, two women, Jane Nickerson and

Cecily Brownstone, have been largely erased from this history. Nickerson and Brownstone, in fact, founded the food scene that Beard and Claiborne would later enter and helped the two men join the New York culinary community.

Finally novelist and professor Angie Cruz writes of the plantain as a sign of home, a site of resistance, a slave food, a racial slur, an alliance builder, a source of pride, and a symbol of resilience. Her piece is both a family history and the migration story of a staple food. That her essay connects Alexander the Great, West Africa, Washington Heights and baseball is a testament to the value of Food Studies, and Culinary History in particular.

I'd like to conclude by thanking the Board for allowing me the opportunity to work on *NYFoodStory*. There is no way I can even attempt to fill the shoes of my predecessor. I will try, however, to maintain her high standards and will do my best to ensure that this journal furthers the goals of our organization and contributes important scholarship to the field of Culinary History. ☺

customers' homes, so they planned their routes so that the last customer of the day was the nicest. They basically all talk about having very positive experiences, people were warm and friendly, their accounts are very upbeat. So, they would sleep in customers' homes, which inevitably led to the housewife asking: "We're happy to have you here; would you like to eat with us?" These customers are Americans or Australians or South Africans, and what they are eating is obviously not kosher food. The peddlers talk about things like bear and squirrel, and so they had to negotiate with themselves – "Do I eat this, do I not eat it? What do I say?" In one memoir, a peddler said he was eating at a customer's home and every dish had pork in it – pork meat, greens with pork, pork in this, lard poured over the biscuits, and he says, "Look I'm eating it." The local Protestant minister was there and said, "I thought Moses made laws that say that Hebrews can't eat the flesh of the swine," and the peddler responded, "You know what, if Moses had come to this place he wouldn't have made those laws."

"What we consider to be deli is a mélange of stuff from around the world. So pastrami comes from Romania ... and corned beef is from Germany, and most of these delis fairly early on start selling halva, and that was from the Ottoman Empire, so what develops ... is this sort of blending which then becomes something called American Jewish food."

**AA:** Would you say that this is not just a change in foodways, but also part of a process of secularization?

**HD:** Absolutely, although we don't know enough about him. It's possible that when he finally settles down and has a store in a town, maybe he reverts to kashrut, but it's situational. Other peddlers say to the housewives, "I can't eat what you're serving me." The housewife often asks why, and the peddler responds that his religion doesn't allow it. This leads the housewife to ask, "What's your religion? And what religion says you can't eat this?" Why would the customers know that? The peddler would explain being Jewish, and sometimes the customers would relate this to people from the Bible. Many of the memoirs, written by both peddlers and customers, say that the women

would ask, "If you can't eat this, what can you eat?" Sometimes peddlers would carry their own pots with them and cook their own food. Or women would say, "Leave the pot here and when you come, I'll use it to make what you can have." Again, it is hard to verify these things, but it has been said, and repeatedly, that many of the Native American groups – because the peddlers would go onto Indian reservations – referred to the peddlers as "egg eaters" because the one thing they would eat would be eggs cooked in their shells. So it's a kind of negotiation along a spectrum. Some would say, "During the week I ate anything but when I went back to the community, to town, on the weekend," which is where they would pay back their creditors and replenish their stock, "then I got to eat Jewish food." How much this extends with them into their life beyond peddling is hard to say. I think you're right that it causes them to think, "You know, I ate squirrel and I'm still a good Jew." And those people who we know more about, who have left really good memoirs, having been out on the road and having

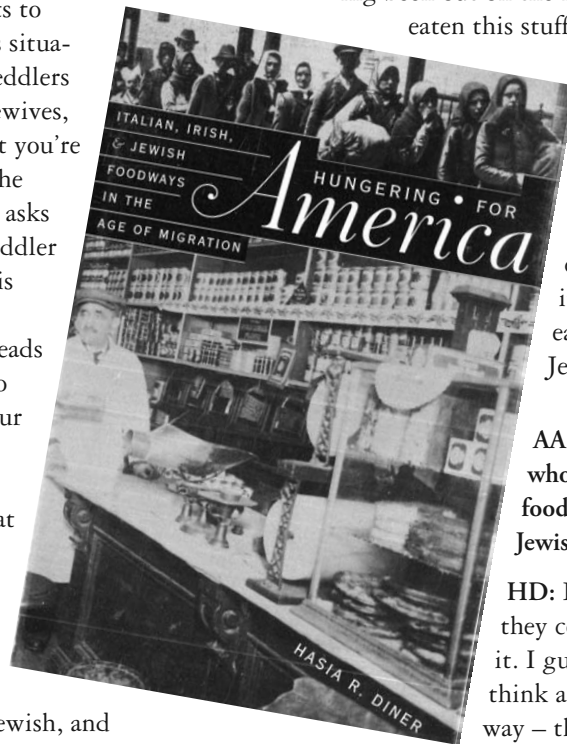
eaten this stuff, we know that when they finally settle down they found the synagogue in their town. So they don't see the connection, as it were, between eating and Jewishness.

**AA:** Like many of us who eat non-kosher food but still feel Jewish.

**HD:** Right, in a sense they come to redefine it. I guess one could think about it this way – there are many other elements of

Jewish law that many observant Jews don't follow. For example, how many modern orthodox people actually

*Ari Ariel is the editor-in-chief of NYFoodstory: The Journal of the Culinary Historians of New York. He holds a Ph.D. from Columbia University and a diploma in classical culinary arts from the French Culinary Institute (now the International Culinary Center). His new book, Jewish-Muslim Relations and Migration from Yemen to Palestine in the Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Brill, 2014), examines Yemeni Jewish emigration, highlighting global transformations and migration theory. He is also particularly interested in ethnic, national, and religious identity, migration, and foodways. This fall, he assumes the position of Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Iowa.*



investigate what their clothing is made of? [Jewish law prohibits mixing wool and linen in garments.] Probably very few go to a *shatnez* expert to analyze the clothes they buy from the Gap. I know the ultra-orthodox do have shatnez institutes, but probably for most observant American Jews, that is something that is not connected to being an observant Jew. And so, for some of these peddlers, maybe many of them, kashrut also went that route. “I know it’s part of the tradition, but it’s not that important, and what’s more important is founding a synagogue, building a school or creating a cemetery.”

**AA:** I wonder if this is also part of the separation between Jewish ethnicity and religiosity?

**HD:** I think that over time that comes to play a part, although looking at these people, where we know the details of their lives, they do participate [in the Jewish community], they create the synagogues in their towns, so I’m almost not sure what the line between ethnicity and religion is within Judaism. In some ways, I don’t think of Judaism as just a religion at all.

**AA:** Even a synagogue is really community center.

**HD:** That’s right. So why did they go there? They went to hang out with their friends, and probably talk about business and catch up on gossip, and afterwards they had cookies at the Kiddush [light ritual refreshments after the religious service].

**AA:** For these Jews, when they come back to wherever their home base is and they have Jewish food, is that “Jewish” food defined by their place of origin, or is there already an idea of a general “Jewish” food?

**HD:** That’s interesting because many of them come back to places where there is going to be a jumble of peddlers [from different places]. The memoir of a man who peddled in the New Orleans area says that he’d come back to New Orleans on the weekends, and he’d spend the weekend with a bunch of other peddlers, other Jews, from Lithuania,

Bavaria, Galicia, Alsace, and he’s Romanian. So they presumably learned from each other about taste, and what’s good. And who’s running the boarding house? Well, that woman—we don’t have any documents from the women

“An employee of an Italian olive oil company ... had come to the United States on business. He was walking around New York ... and he saw signs for something called an ‘Italian restaurant’ ... He decided to order what he thought was the most unusual thing on the menu, spaghetti and meatballs. And he said it was so good that somebody should send it back to Italy; people in Italy would love it too.”

who ran these boarding houses—but I think we can assume that she both has her way of cooking, how to make a Friday night dinner, but also she says, “I know there are a bunch of Alsatians here, and they’d like such and such.”

**AA:** And then those regional foods merge to form a Jewish cuisine?

**HD:** That’s right. So what emerges is something that’s acceptable to everybody. Certainly we know this in cities. What we consider to be deli is a *mélange* of stuff from around the world. So pastrami comes from Romania, and the Romanians were a very tiny part of the Jewish immigrant population to the United States, and corned beef is from Germany, and most of these delis fairly early on start selling halva, and that was from the Ottoman Empire, so what develops as an American Jewish cooking style, or cuisine, or foodway, is this sort

of blending which then becomes something called American Jewish food or Jewish food in America. And marriage patterns in the immigrant generation, those who come single very early on – unlike among Italians where regional marriage patterns at least persist for a while, maybe a generation – among Jews it was gone. They married across lines and so there are all these letters to the editor in the Jewish daily *Forward* which say, “I’m from Galicia and my wife’s from Lithuania, and how can I tell her that her cooking is disgusting. I so long for the foods and tastes ... but she won’t cook them.”

## Behind the lunch counter

continued from page nine

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Author calculations based on review of Local 372 (Board of Education); School Lunch Employees: Grievances 1958-1961; box 48; files 12 and 13; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

<sup>2</sup> “Food Workers Picket Board for Increase,” *New Amsterdam News*, 28 June 1947, p. 14. “School Lunch Workers Heard,” *The New York Times*, 26 June 1947, p. 16. The historical record does not indicate if the workers got their pay raise after picketing.

<sup>3</sup> Gray letter to Rubin, May 24, 1962; Max Rubin Files; State, County and Municipal Employees; Box 1; Series 379; File 199; New York City Municipal Archives.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in memo from Sylvia Jaffee to John Ferris, November 8, 1963; Max Rubin Files; Board of Education; box 1; series 379; file 489; New York City Municipal Archives.

<sup>5</sup> Calliste Grievance Letter, Aug. 1958; Local 372 (Board of Education); School Lunch Employees: Grievances 1958-1961; box 48; file 12; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

<sup>6</sup> Strahan Memo to Gray, Dec. 12, 1959; Local 372 (Board of Education); School Lunch Employees: Grievances 1958-1961; box 48; file 12; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

<sup>7</sup> Strahan Letter to Hayes, Oct. 18, 1962; Local 372 (Board of Education); School Lunch Employees: Grievances 1958-1961; box 48; file 12; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

<sup>8</sup> Wise letter to Strahan, Feb. 6, 1960; Local 372 (Board of Education); School Lunch Employees: Grievances, 1958 – 1961; box 48; file 12; Tamiment / Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

<sup>9</sup> Wise letter to Whalen, May 16, 1957; Local 372 (Board of Education); School Lunch Employees: Grievances, 1958 – 1961; box 48; file 12; Tamiment / Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

<sup>10</sup> Wise letter to Raynor, Feb. 25, 1961; Local 372 (Board of Education); School Lunch Employees: Grievances 1957 – 1961; box 48; file 12; Tamiment Library / Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

about slavery, freedom, faith and food. Other documents filled in more details, and eventually resulted in a cookbook based on "Aunt Becky's" recipes, *Down by the Creek: Cooking with Rebecca Turner in Old Town Eastchester*.

Founded in 1664 by 10 Connecticut families, Eastchester is one of the nation's oldest towns. The original settlement was a rural enclave seven miles east of the Harlem River nestled between the Bronx and Hutchinson Rivers. It was a frontier community of middling farmers, servants and slaves clustered around a tidal creek and an Indian path that became the original Boston Post Road. The colonists built shelters and rationed food supplies until forests were cleared, crops planted and harvested. It became a conveniently located part of New York's "bread basket."<sup>4</sup>

As Eastchester planned its 2014 Sesquicentennial celebration, researchers wrote a history of "Old Town."<sup>5</sup> They turned to its earliest records and recalled the names and achievements of the settlers. A prominent agreement in the founders' 1665 governing covenant required "that one man either of himself or by consent may give entertainment to strangers for money."<sup>6</sup> Before the construction of a church and completion of their homesteads they established the office of tavern keeper.<sup>7</sup>

Eastchester taverns were places where Town Meetings were held, fraternal soci-

eties gathered, politics and gossip discussed, post riders delivered mail, notices posted, and exhausted farmers unwound with pints of ale and danced to rousing live music. Importantly, they offered food, drink and lodging for visitors passing through the area.

Charles Guion's and Billy Crawford's Taverns were Eastchester's most celebrated inns. They were menu-less eateries with common long wooden tables heaped with hearty soups, seasonal seafood, fresh

Finding food and drink,  
so essential to life, generously  
logged in a death journal  
was astounding. It revealed  
obscured sources ...  
about Rebecca's family meals  
[and] ... sample menus at  
Billy Crawford's Tavern.

fruit and vegetables, wild game, poultry, various meats, pastries, beer, cider and wine pressed from local vines. They were family operations often employing enslaved women to work in their kitchens and service the nightly rooms.

A record dated April 23, 1672 cited the sale of a "*neager woman about 30 years of age which (was) formerly bought of William Larance of Fairfield*" by Moses Hoite, one of the founders.<sup>8</sup> The enslavement of this anonymous woman was not peculiar. Women like her did not wield an axe to clear the forests or drive nails to construct crude shelters, but worked in gardens, washed, cleaned, spun, made garments, cared for children and prepared meals.

By 1750 Africans were common among Eastchester's families.<sup>9</sup> Captive women likely felt differently about food cultivation, cooking and consumption than their masters. Bondage always reminded them they did not own land, produce, livestock, or the kitchens where they cooked and often slept.<sup>10</sup> They were preoccupied with managing the exploitation of their labor and humanity. Hopes that freedom would one day bring the necessities of independent life such as land, housing, food and opportunities to prosper were fleeting and escaped most.

By the end of the 18th century creolized African women waiting for news of state-wide emancipation faithfully cooked, cleaned and served until death and were placed in unceremonious graves, leaving few historical footprints.<sup>11</sup>

Modern New Yorkers have little memory of the region's forgotten slaves. Their spirits were left to plead for public recognition from "Negro burial grounds." Rebecca Franklin-Turner, known as "Aunt Becky" was one of the neglected women.<sup>12</sup>

\*

Born in New York, Rebecca reached adolescence during the struggle to establish our national republic. She belonged to James and Gloriana Franklin, wealthy 18th-century Quakers.<sup>13</sup> By the time she was 12 she fetched water and wood, built a perfect fire, gathered eggs, milked cows, killed and plucked chickens and tended kettles and roasting spits at the hearth. She watched older enslaved women under Gloriana's supervision cook elaborate meals, bake bread, pies and pastries.<sup>14</sup>

As a young woman, Rebecca learned to cook and serve their well-to-do guests, for whom no detail was spared.<sup>15</sup> Her reputation at the Franklins' led to gainful employment at Charles Guion's legendary Post Road tavern, known for its hospitality and patriotic support during the War for Independence. Guion was influential in the three powerful town institutions, the church, the annual Town Meetings and taverns. His favor was beneficial during Rebecca's transition from slavery to freedom and self-determination.<sup>16</sup>

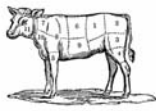
In 1805, Rebecca took advantage of the Franklins' compliance with New York's 1799 Gradual Abolition law and was granted freedom.<sup>17</sup> She immediately married Benjamin Turner, a freedman formerly owned by a Quaker family from the adjoining Town of Westchester.<sup>18</sup> Charles Guion brokered, for the Turners, a long-term lease for common land adjacent to the church cemetery. The growing family settled on the "garden lot" and worked as farmers, cooks and laundresses.<sup>19</sup> They earned wages, bartered produce, paid taxes and established stable lives as independent citizens. The Turners were broadly respected and tasted what it felt like to

*Larry H. Spruill, PhD, has spent a half-century living and working in Mount Vernon, New York, and has served as its municipal historian for the past 25 years. He is an author, award-winning photographer, and history professor at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. He has spent three decades researching and writing about colonial and early African American life in Westchester County. He is the lead historian and designer of Westchester's African American Historic Trail. In 2000, he was designated the inaugural Westchester County Trailblazer in History by the County Executive and Legislature. He is currently finishing a cookbook and novel about Rebecca and Benjamin Turner and their lost legacy in the town of Eastchester.*

## Rebecca Turner's Creek Grocery Lists

|                    |                                                               |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| November 23, 1844  | Samuel 1.2 lb Lard Cr(redit) to candles                       |
| January 31, 1844   | Samuel Nelson Dr (buy) Red Cow \$8.00                         |
| April 19, 1844     | Cash let to (Samuel Nelson) to by pig.                        |
| June 3, 1844       | Samuel Draw Manour out to manour Potatoe Ground               |
| June 13, 1844      | draff against to Salsoda                                      |
| June 27, 1844      | Pair Suspenders 1 hankerchief                                 |
| July 3, 1844       | 2 fish lines                                                  |
| July 4, 1844       | Pack fire crackers (by Samuel) Bottle of Beer                 |
| August 3, 1844     | Boots for Abrahm (Turner) 1 lb butter 1 1/4 lb cheese         |
| August 3, 1844     | Paid Sam Nelson to cutting Salt Meadow                        |
| August 16, 1844    | 4 1/2 lbs port (sent) 2 loaves bread by Doriana (Nelson)      |
| August 19, 1844    | Sam 1 lb shot (gunpowder) Bar of Soap 6 Starch mustard        |
| August 30, 1844    | Samuel Port 6 Potatoes 1/2 lb candles                         |
| September 14, 1844 | Samuel 1/2 peck potatoes                                      |
| November 25, 1844  | Samuel 1/2 peck Salt Loaf Bread                               |
| November 30, 1844  | Samuel 1 lb sugar 6 1 lb cheese to 1.2 oz Castor Oil          |
| December 19, 1844  | Samuel 2 oz Ground cinnamon paper of pepper                   |
| March 18, 1845     | Sam(uell) 14 lbs flour                                        |
| March 28, 1845     | Flounder books                                                |
| April 18, 1845     | 3 1/2 lbs Sugar Self (Samuel) 1 lb Butter 6 plug Tobal(cco)   |
| June 13, 1845      | Sugar 6 2 oz Blk Tea                                          |
| June 18, 1845      | Peck Charcoal                                                 |
| June 21, 1845      | Sally (Nelson) Cider                                          |
| July 5, 1845       | Bottler Balm                                                  |
| July 11, 1845      | 1/2 Bush(ell) Coal                                            |
| January 12, 1846   | Bottle of Oppadidoc                                           |
| December 7, 1846   | Sept 21st Cr(redit) by peck peaches                           |
| December 28, 1846  | P(aid) for Bag of Barley Flour                                |
| February 22, 1847  | Samuel Sawing 6 splitt 1/4 cord of Hickory wood for church    |
| March 20, 1847     | Doriana (Nelson) got of Maria (Turner) 3 1/2 lb sugar         |
| March 25, 1847     | Sally (Sarah) Nelson Loaf of Bread Becky (Turner) got         |
| March 26, 1847     | 1/2 lb candles Sally (Nelson) got                             |
| April 1, 1847      | 1 1/2 lbs crackers 1/4 lb coffee 1/4 1/4 lb Blk tea 6 candies |
| January 14, 1848   | Bar Soap 1/4 lb Salaratus                                     |
| March 28, 1848     | 14 lbs best wheat flour due on Tea etc                        |
| May 27, 1848       | 1 piece Veal brisket 6 1/2#                                   |
| June 3, 1848       | 5 3/4 veal                                                    |
| June 8, 1848       | 4 lb Beef                                                     |
| June 12, 1848      | Samuel Nelson 1 lb Sugar 1 codfish                            |
| June 24, 1848      | 3 1/2 lbs Veal                                                |
| June 26, 1848      | 2 Loaves of Bread 1/2 lb coffee                               |
| June 28, 1848      | Cash paid Samuel Mexican Dollar                               |
| July 25, 1848      | 5 lbs Mutton                                                  |
| September 29, 1848 | 28 lbs of Wheat Flour 1b Tea fowchong 6 Young hyson mixed     |
| October 18, 1848   | 1/2 Bush(ell) Turnips to Samuel                               |
| October 21, 1848   | Young Samuel Due on Soap 6 Candy got for sister               |
| January 27, 1849   | Samuel dug Grave paid 29 time Saly (Nelson) had daughter      |
| May 4, 1849        | Samuel 6 his Father paid returned from Mill - meal I sent for |
| May 14, 1849       | Doriana Nelson Interred Samuel Nelsons Daughter               |
| July 17, 1849      | Abm 6 Henry (Turner) 6 Ferris a glass of bier 6 cider         |
| August 3, 1849     | Abm Turner Interred Rebecca Turners Son                       |
| August 27, 1849    | Pipes 6 paper Tobal(cco) Sam(uell) 1 lb shot (gunpowder)      |

Samuel Nelson, a fugitive slave married Sarah Ann Turner, daughter of Benjamin and Rebecca Turner. They shared the Turner homestead and upon Benjamin's 1832 death worked in the cemetery to help support Rebecca's extended family. This partial list of provision is from the Records of St. Paul's Church, Eastchester Volume II Sexton's Book, 1842-1850.



Down By The Creek  
2014 © Larry Spruill

Documents compiled from St. Paul's Church and Cemetery archives and designed and illustrated by Larry H. Spruill

"I Do hereby Certify that my Black Servant Woman Rebecca was delivered of a Female Child Whose Name is Mary on the Twenty fourth of September Eighteen hundred and Six. Gloriana Franklin Entered East Chester March 6 1810 By me John Alstyne."<sup>23</sup>

Mary lived to be 99 years old. Unlike many former slaves of her parents' generation, she knew her precise birthday. When *The Times* toured the region, "Aunt Mary" was the personification of what was left of Old Town.<sup>24</sup> She passed on the controversial story of her mother cooking and caring for General George Washington during a wartime sickness and recovery at Guion's.<sup>25</sup> She said Rebecca made broth, soup, peas and an apple pie for the general. As evi-

dence she wore a shawl, an heirloom given to Rebecca by Washington.<sup>26</sup> A neighbor translated Aunt Mary's recollections in stereotypical "Southern" Negro dialect explaining that, "Gin'rl Washington, he war taken powerful sick at the old tavern... I made him broth and soup. Bime-(till) he got so he could eat peas. He was powerful fond of green peas, and could eat three sassers of 'em at a meal; green apple pie, too; he war just as fond of that; and he done say that I did just make de bestest apple pies he ever did eat."<sup>27</sup>

The narrator claimed Washington was impressed with Rebecca's green apple pie. Legend or fact, there is no question the general stayed at the tavern and Guion's property had apple and other fruit trees. A newspaper printed a public notice that Guion's son was going to "...sell at public auction...the

FARM situated in the town of Eastchester near the Episcopal Church, late the property of Charles Guion, deceased,<sup>16</sup> miles from New York, containing about forty-two acres of land...a large spacious House, a good Barn, Stable, Carriage House, and other out-buildings; and there is a well of good water near the door. On the place there is a quantity of good fruit."<sup>28</sup>

Long after her death, *The Times* introduced Aunt Becky as "a famous cook," but did not define her cookery beyond the colorful account of her baking. It is known that Eastchester apples were available, as were ingredients for common pastry.<sup>29</sup> A recipe for a "General Washington's Green Apple Pie" was tested for my book, *Down By The Creek, Cooking with Rebecca Turner in Old Town Eastchester*.<sup>30</sup>

In our time, we take for granted that notable dishes begin with replicable recipes detailing ingredients, measurements, utensils and cooking time. Like so many cooks of her era, Rebecca Turner's recipes required experiential, experimental and memorized procedures to consistently satisfy diners. She internalized approximate measurements of specific spices and ingredients while observing, smelling, touching and tasting dishes to her perfection.

Thus, the challenges of assembling a credible cookbook for an illiterate New York slave were many. The work required verified personal access to locally grown ingredients. After 200 years, it seemed impossible to know the contents of Aunt Becky's pantry. I was determined to locate a repository of foodstuffs related to her mythical cookery. After years of research and good fortune: "Eureka!"

The breakthrough came while I was tracing her daughter, Sarah (Sally) Ann's 1826 marriage to Samuel Nelson, a recently arrived fugitive slave seeking refuge and work. He was taken in and hired by the Fay-Griggs family, the owners of the defunct Crawford's Tavern.<sup>31</sup> Sarah Ann mostly likely worked at the house when she met Nelson. For the next 30 years the couple was employed at the Fay-Griggs house. In 1836, John Griggs became the rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church.

continued on following page ►

By 1832, Rebecca was forced to rely on laundry and domestic services for income. Her sons and son-in-law found work in the cemetery and they often "traded out" for their labor. The interment journal for the church burial ground described the goods and provisions available at the general store run by the church sexton. By the 1840s frequent purchases of soap indicated Rebecca's reliance her laundry business. However, she never stopped cooking, as is evidenced by the quantity and variety of meat, fish, grains, vegetables, fruit and spices listed.

be somewhat "ordinary" in segregated antebellum New York.<sup>20</sup>

Their land included a vegetable garden and an enclosure for chickens, pigs, a cow and horse. Natural fruit and nut trees, and bramble bushes, as well as fowl and game in the meadows and forests supplemented their diets. Like other town folk they cut salt meadow hay to feed their livestock, and fished and gathered oysters and clams from the waterway. They used their horse to ride or hitch to a spring-less wagon to conduct day-work for the church, cemetery, taverns and neighboring farmers. What was not available from the land, streams, bay and forests was bartered or purchased at the general store.<sup>21</sup>

Rebecca's daughter, Mary Turner-Treadwell's certificate of birth was recorded as required by the new abolition laws.<sup>22</sup> In 1810, Gloriana Franklin testified,

Samuel was hired as the gravedigger. He and Sarah Ann raised four children across the Post Road at the Turner homestead.<sup>32</sup>

Samuel's steady work helped support Rebecca's extended family. Opening and closing graves was hard work rewarded with cash or credit for goods at the general store. From 1842 to 1850 Theodosius Hunt, grocer and church sexton, kept a journal of burials and carefully noted those hired to dig graves, as well as what and how they were paid.<sup>33</sup> The detailed transactions from "the book of the dead" were primarily with Samuel Nelson and periodically Rebecca's sons, Abraham, Henry and Joshua.

Finding food and drink, so essential to life, generously logged in a death journal was astounding. It revealed obscured sources not only about Rebecca's family meals but led to sample menus at Billy Crawford's Tavern.<sup>34</sup> The journal chronicled transactions with gravediggers, itemizing the portions and price of bartered or credited provisions. It was a "grocery list" for Rebecca Turner's kitchen, a real-time indicator of her cooking and dining habits. It was a treasure trove of opportunities to recreate what they ate and drank. The lists included diverse meats, fish, grains, vegetables, beverages, cooking oils and spices, cooking fuels, soap, candles, medicines, work clothes and tools, hunting and fishing equipment, candies, smoking tobacco, beer, wine and even an almanac.<sup>35</sup>

As a young woman, Rebecca learned to cook and serve their well-to-do guests, for whom no detail was spared. Her reputation at the Franklins' led to gainful employment at Charles Guion's legendary Post Road tavern.

The Turner-Nelsons did not suffer from the lack of food. Aware of the insecurities of other freedmen, Rebecca was grateful that her family ate well and often. Her dining table was not only for eating but a sacred gathering place for expressing faith, gratitude and blessings for daily meals.<sup>36</sup>



Crawford's Tavern, built in 1732 and also known as the Fay-Griggs homestead, was located opposite St. Paul's Church and the Turner homestead. William Crawford operated it during the American Revolution. Samuel and Sarah Turner-Nelson were affiliated with the house until their deaths in 1867 and 1860 respectively. In 1966, it was torn down to make room for industrial development.

Courtesy of Mount Vernon Public Library, Virginia Moskowitz Local History Room

Samuel and Sarah Ann's connection to Billy Crawford's Tavern supports the Turner tradition of lifelong cooking and service affiliations with the town's important families and social and religious institutions. The Fay-Griggses were intimate and supportive neighbors. Samuel's years of service were remembered with a tombstone in full view of the Turner homestead. The inscription recorded his close relationship to the Crawford House.

In 1942, Mary Hicks-Fay wrote a history of her husband's family connection to Crawford's Tavern.<sup>37</sup> She referenced sources describing meals served in the dining hall. Oyster dishes were enjoyed by all social classes and were so popular that communal harvesting of the beds had to be regulated by the following April 3, 1792 ordinance:

"Also agreed by vote...that there shall be no oysters got out of East Chester Creek up to Fisher's Landing by no person or persons whatsoever without the consent of one of the Trustees of said town, after the first day of May now next, until the fifteenth day of September next ensuing, and person or persons whosoever found offending against this act it shall be lawful for the Trustees to fine him, them, or her..."<sup>38</sup>

The poor were dependent on oysters and shellfish. The question is how did Rebecca prepare them? Mary Hicks-Fay offered a possible response to the question.

From family records and oral histories she described the tavern's menu:

"Eastchester Lodge No. 46 of the Masonic order conducted its meetings at (Crawford's) Inn in the year 1797, paying for the use of it six pounds, three shillings and six pence per annum. Its communications were held every Monday at four in the afternoon when the Moon was at full according to John Grigg's records... As the door opened in came the members, bowing to each other... The Chairman called the meeting to order... Many resolutions were passed... the meeting adjourned and the members were delighted to hear the dinner bell rung by the hostess of the Inn... the general stampede for the tables... the onslaught on the tempting edibles thereon arranged, from soup, wine, and steaming oysters to nuts, after which cake was served and eaten with relish. The food vanished..."<sup>39</sup>

She gave an additional reference to tavern cooking and eating from around the time Rebecca worked at Guion's:

"As the door would open again admitting the balmy air, the patrons inside, with appetite getting sharper every minute after their long journey from New York, waited to hear the call of the evening dinner bell. This same bell Billy (Crawford) gave to John Grigg. When it was sounded the patrons, all respectably dressed, entered the dinning room, and found on the menu such good things as beef, ham and eggs, hot

biscuits and old-fashioned gingerbread, honey, sweetmeats, apple sauce, apricots and an after-piece of pie..."<sup>40</sup>

Rebecca's "grocery lists" and Mary Hicks-Fays' reflections together form a unique mosaic portrait of Old Town's cuisine and a historical foundation for the mythologized "Aunt Becky's" cooking. I used these two sources to identify and recreate the content and quality of family and tavern recipes in my book. Her family meals were certainly rudimentary but satisfying affairs. However, the lists suggested she occasionally made fancier meals, perhaps once served to road-weary diners feasting at the Guion's Tavern.

The Old Towners were "Yankees," and chowder was a staple, even at the Turners'. On her grocery lists were essential ingredients for a "John and Joseph Fay's Cod Fish Chowder." Both were neighbors and witnessed her Last Will and Testament in 1871.<sup>41</sup> It was a dish certainly prepared during her service at Guions.

The following provisions from the "grocery lists" likely made a flavorful chowder for appreciative farmers:

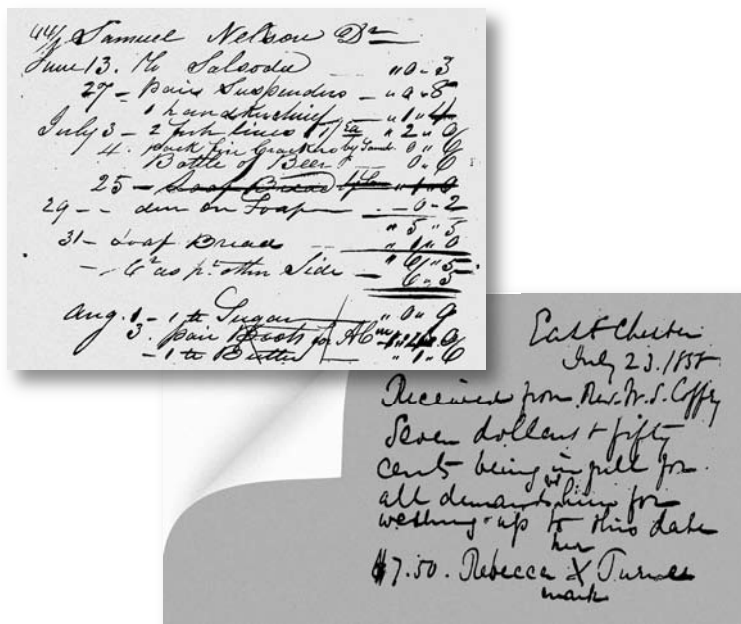
January 31, 1844 Samuel Nelson Dr (due) Red Cow  
 September 14, 1844 Samuel 1/2 peck potatoes  
 September 20, 1844 Samuel due on pork  
 November 25, 1844 Samuel 1/2 peck Salt Samuel Loaf Bread  
 December 19, 1844 Samuel paper of pepper

April 1, 1847 She (Becky or Sally?) said... 1/ 1/2 lb crackers  
 June 12, 1848 Samuel Nelson 1 codfish<sup>42</sup>  
 July 3-4, 1844 2 fish lines pack (fire-crackers by Samuel) Bottle of Beer<sup>43</sup>

Today, the Fourth of July might include fishing, fireworks and a few cold beers. It is not unreasonable to envision Rebecca cleaning and battering the catch for an outdoor fish fry cooking "Samuel Nelson's Fried Flounder." Fish battered with local ground cornmeal, pan-fried in lard must have filled the air with an aroma that attracted neighbors and friends alike to gather and partake in the seafood feast.<sup>44</sup>

In creating *Down By The Creek*, my greatest challenge was identifying archival food references and connecting and converting their content to early New York recipes. The cookbook's conceptual foundation was the appropriate use of documented food sources relevant to Rebecca's pantry, and hearth and later stove cookery.<sup>45</sup> Inevitably the best understanding of her reputation was for home-cooked meals.

The cookbook includes a "slice of Old Town history" for every recipe. The first dish was assembled from a citation describing Benjamin Turner serving as an authorized but unofficial town pounder permitted to hold stray animals for a fee. It was the earliest record confirming "a Turner residence."



A scan from the 1844 Cemetery Interment ledger, top, shows Samuel Nelson's contribution to Rebecca Turner's grocery lists and household needs: salsoda, pairs of suspenders, handkerchief, fishing lines, firecrackers, beer, soap, bread, cider, sugar, boots and butter. An 1858 receipt for \$7.50 from Dr. William S. Coffey, rector of St. Paul's Church, made out to Rebecca Turner, for washing the minister's clothing and vestments.

"Taken up on the 29th day of Sept 1818 a stray cow a black cow with white star in her forehead the owner may have her again by providing property and paying charges by applying to Benjamin Turner in the town of East Chester N.B. Said cow has 4 white feet & a belly Entered East Chester Sept 30th 1818 By Benjm. H. Underhill Town Clerk fee not pd."<sup>46</sup>

It was not difficult to imagine unclaimed strays finding their way into Rebecca's well-seasoned soup kettle. The cookbook's first dish is a hearty "Benjamin Turner's Oxtail Soup." It was prepared to refresh the hardworking men at the homestead.

Tragically, Benjamin died in 1832, leaving Rebecca a widowed head of household.<sup>47</sup> It was the beginning of unsettling times. The creation of commuter railroads brought thousands of city-dwellers seeking relief from urban blight.<sup>48</sup> The trains drew away the taverns' customers and economic vitality. To feed the family and pay property taxes Rebecca took in more laundry. At the same time, once loyal customers increasingly preferred and hired young Irish women who competed with her daughters for domestic service jobs.<sup>49</sup>

Upwardly mobile city workers and ambitious immigrants followed the railroads northward and established commuter villages. Eastchester's proximity made it prime real estate for suburban

development. Anticipating the extension of rail lines along the Bronx River and rumors of a second track toward New Haven, farmers sold their land, moved and started new lives.<sup>50</sup> Rebecca's sons lost their farm work and found only occasional odd jobs. By 1850, two of her sons were dead.<sup>51</sup> Several of her daughters married and left for New York. Rebecca, Samuel, Sarah Ann and their children chose to remain close by the Eastchester Creek.<sup>52</sup>

In 1850, the train to New Haven came through Eastchester. The following year 1,000 New York families began to build houses on small

lots and organized the village of Mount Vernon. At the Creek, life remained simple; the water was clean and full of fish and the old ways honored. In 1854, Samuel and Sarah Ann gave birth to their last child, Sarah Elizabeth. Aunt Mary was widowed in 1855 and returned home to help her mother with the laundry business. Sarah Ann died in 1860 and Samuel in 1867, leaving Sarah Elizabeth in Rebecca and Aunt Mary's care.<sup>53</sup>

When Rebecca died in 1874, Mount Vernon was a growing village with future commercial and industrial plans for Eastchester's creek and dock.<sup>54</sup>

continued on following page ►

Fortunately for Mary Turner-Treadwell, heiress of the estate, the region was under Eastchester's jurisdiction. Two decades later, in 1892, Mount Vernon became an incorporated city and proposed annexing neighboring villages under the guise of a "Greater Mount Vernon."<sup>55</sup> Acquiring Eastchester Creek was its priority.

In 1895, *The New York Times* anticipated Old Town's clash with New York and Mount Vernon's territorial and industrial ambitions. It foresaw the defenseless hamlet's demise. The creek tour included a stroll through the overgrown church cemetery. After short

story for the last time not just to town-folk but the newspaper's cosmopolitan readers. It was as if their interviews were final words before an execution.

The 20th century was not kind to the elderly women. The onslaught of paved roads, automobiles, indoor plumbing, electricity and a national fixation on oil overwhelmed their old-fashioned existence. Aunt Mary and Sarah Elizabeth stood in the way of progress and modernity. The homestead was an impediment to straightening and dredging the ancient tidal stream to make it a deep-waterway capable of docking and storing petroleum and home construction sup-

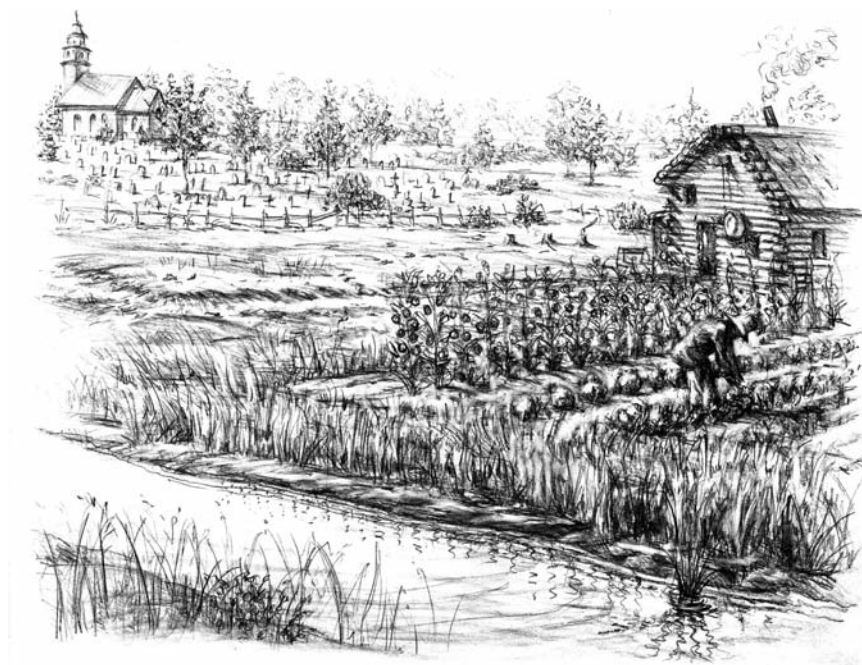


Illustration from *When the Train Came* by Carle Robinson and Larry Spuill

The homestead of Benjamin and Rebecca Turner was on the north bank of Eastchester Creek. Charles Guion, tavern owner, church vestryman, superintendent of common lands and a trustee of the Overseers of the Poor helped the Turners to realize their dream of land ownership.

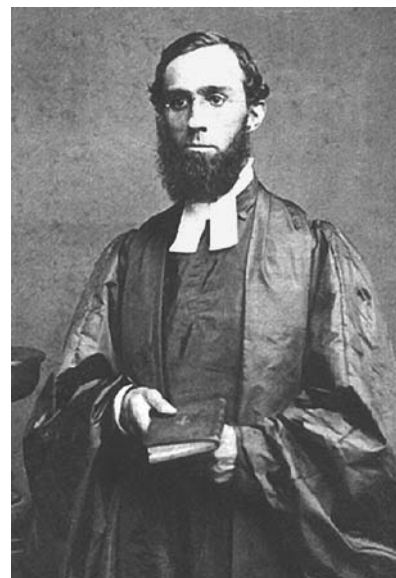
excursions to the remaining colonial houses and abandoned structures, the reporter was convinced that the nostalgic story needed a human connection, endangered personalities clinging to rural lifestyles while facing Greater New York and Mount Vernon's uncompromising industrial invasions.<sup>56</sup>

Unexpectedly, the reporter found Aunt Mary and Sarah Elizabeth living in the century-old clapboard house with an outdoor privy, deep-water well, chickens running about the yard and garden, cooking and washing and worshipping at the church. They were the face of vanishing rural metropolitan New York. Old Town was indeed a community facing extinction. The women told Rebecca's

plies on its banks.<sup>57</sup>

Mary Turner-Treadwell died in 1905 and was buried with her ancestors. Sarah Elizabeth's older sister, Maria came to live with her.<sup>58</sup> They continued to work as laundresses. Besides fierce competition from Chinese launderers, Mount Vernon city officials made it difficult for them to remain at the Creek. In 1912, Sarah Elizabeth and Maria left for New Jersey and worked as domestic servants. In 1916, Sarah wrote an appeal letter to the Mayor and Common Council:

*"Gentlemen: I am one of the heirs of the property of Rebecca Turner deceased. We were compelled to leave the old place over four years ago on account of our surroundings. I will explain right here what I*



Courtesy of St. Paul's Church and Cemetery National Historic Site Archives, National Parks Service

Dr. William S. Coffey, pictured here in 1852, served for 57 years as the rector of St. Paul's Church. One of the first people he met there was Rebecca Turner, who lived directly behind the parish house. In an 1865 discourse on church and local history he made reference to "good old Aunt Becky" as an Eastchester Creek "landmark."

*mean. My sister and me lived alone; our chickens were taken and we were disturbed nights. The garbage was dumped around our place so that it was difficult for us to get to the road. It was also impossible for us to do laundry work for a living any more, as the grass and everything was covered with ashes and the well water was spoiled so that we were obliged to carry it from a neighbor's well, and the saloon was also an annoyance to us...we could not stand it any longer. Will you please send me the bill of our taxes and assessments. We have been in possession of the property nearly a hundred years and paid our taxes until several years ago. Gentlemen I appeal to you for help will you not reconsider this bill of ours and reduce it and give us another chance at it...I will go to Mount Vernon and see about it if you will send me word when to go."*<sup>59</sup>

There was no invitation to return or consideration of a tax reduction. Mount Vernonites did not know or care about Benjamin and Rebecca Turner. "Aunt Becky's" legacy was buried in her unmarked grave; however, the Turner story was not over. For the next quarter-century Sarah Elizabeth continued to fight for the Turner property.<sup>60</sup>

In 1931, Maria Nelson died in Creswell, New Jersey. Sarah Elizabeth arranged for her burial in the cemetery with their parents. She attended the funeral and never returned to Mount

Vernon. In 1941, two months after the homestead was foreclosed and sold to an oil company, Sarah died in a lonely Nyack rooming house. In her last will and testament she bequeathed her modest estate to a wealthy patron. Unlike her ancestors there was no one to return her earthly remains to the cemetery by the Creek. She was buried at the top of a hill overlooking the Hudson in a segregated Rockland graveyard.<sup>61</sup>

Sarah Elizabeth left a trail of documents about her grandmother's encounters with slavery, freedom, family, faith and, of course, food. An attorney from the foreclosure hearings wrote that her detailed deposition "was based not only on her memory, but also on correspondence, notes and entries" through which she kept her family alive as encouragement.<sup>62</sup> In a dramatic 1934 letter to Mount Vernon politicians ending her 30-year fight to regain the "Turner Lot," she recalled Rebecca's dinner table and unshakable faith. She wrote,

*"The land is in your hands, I am the last heir, the city may go right on and do what they like as before, It is now over a hundred years ago, since our dear and godly grand parents, gathered their children for family prayers, morning and*

The trains drew away  
the taverns' customers and  
economic vitality. To feed the  
family and pay property taxes  
Rebecca took in more laundry.  
At the same time, once loyal  
customers increasingly  
preferred and hired young Irish  
women who competed with  
her daughters for domestic  
service jobs.

*evenings, and a blessing at each meal, and it was handed down to us, to me the last heir. Now I can say with boldness their God is my God. A father to the fatherless and a judge of the widows. Psalm. 68.5 and, the Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. Psalm. 23.1."*<sup>63</sup>

In 2012, the National Parks Service discovered Rebecca Turner's burial site and erected a gravestone at St. Paul's Church and Cemetery, National His-

toric Site.<sup>64</sup> It marked "Aunt Becky's" formal recognition as a pioneering Eastchester woman.

*Down By The Creek, Cooking with Rebecca Turner in Old Town Eastchester* is a social history about an accomplished entrepreneurial cook and servant. It is also a tribute to her and to her family, as hardworking "Old New Yorkers" who made the best of their bondage and liberation. *Down By The Creek* is an appreciation of this inspirational American family, living, laboring and dining in Old Town Eastchester.

\*\*\*

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>"A Historic East Chester Ancient Colonial Tavern Where Washington Was Entertained, Recent Discovery of Interesting Old Relic." *The New York Times*, October 20, 1895.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Larry H. Spruill, *A Time to Remember, A Portrait of African American Life in Mount Vernon, N.Y.* (African American Workshop, 1987), pp. 1-99.

<sup>4</sup>Otto Hufeland, *Westchester County During The American Revolution, 1775-1783*. (New York: Harbor Hill Books, Harrison, New York), 1926, 1982. During the Revolutionary War the British and patriotic forces focused on Westchester County to supply New York City and their armies. The constant foraging and pillage of farms was major cause of the evacuation of large numbers of the farmers.

<sup>5</sup>Richard Forlano and Eloise L. Morgan, eds. *Out of The Wilderness, The Emergence of Eastchester, Tuckahoe and Bronxville, 1664-2014*. Scheduled for a fall 2014 release during the 350th anniversary of the founding of the Town of Eastchester.

<sup>6</sup>*Records of the Town of Eastchester, 1665*. The original 10 families drew up *The Eastchester Covenant*, listing 27 agreed-upon rules or governing framework for the fledgling community. Establishing the office of tavern keeper was rule number 20.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>*Records of the Town of Eastchester, Book Two*, Eastchester Historical Society, transcribed 1964, p. 13 ½.

<sup>9</sup>In 1710 Eastchester's population was 314, including 25 slaves. In 1790, out of 730 persons 75 were slaves; and in 1800 the town had 819 inhabitants with 106 slaves. The figures are from a 1710 colonial census and the 1790 and 1800 federal censuses.

<sup>10</sup>Caleb Morgan's 1803 will stated "I give my...my negro woman Easter to my beloved wife so long as she remains my widow...and the liberty of making use of the kitchen for the Negro Woman Easter to lodge in and to wash bake and cook in..." *From Caleb Morgan's 1803 Last Will and Testament, Eastchester, New York*. Caleb and Charles Morgan married Charles Guion's nieces, Isabella and Susanah. See Edward T. Oakley's "The Guions of Eastchester." Town of Eastchester Series: Families, No. 1. William S. Pellatreau's, *Early wills of Westchester County, New York: from 1664 to 1784*, New York Surrogate's Office at White Plains, N.Y.

<sup>11</sup>Gloriana Thomas-Franklin was born September 27, 1740. In 1800, she had 10 slaves; two were inherited from her father. There are questions as to why Gloriana manumitted Rebecca and left Hannah and Nat Franklin, her oldest and dedicated slaves, in bondage for nearly the balance of their lives. She

included them in her will with the promise of land and substantial support. The will was amended in 1812. They served her until her 1824 death. They enjoyed less than 10 years of freedom. For Hannah and Nat, freedom was an elusive dream. See the detailed provisions for the couple in "The Last Will and Testament of Gloriana Franklin, August 24, 1810, in the Town of Eastchester."

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. Rebecca was not mentioned in Gloriana's wills, indicating she was manumitted and married between 1800 and 1809. During the years following the passage of New York's 1799 Gradual Emancipation Act, rural free black families like the Turners refused to follow others fleeing to the squalor of segregated New York City's black communities. They chose to cast their lot with town folk and work through the inevitable indignities and denial of civil liberties.

Owning land with the help of whites was their path to long-term stability. Benjamin and Rebecca attached their family to the stability of St. Paul's Church and cemetery and nearby taverns.

<sup>13</sup>James and his siblings were members of New York's influential *nouveau riche*. When the city served as the nation's first capital, Walter Franklin's Manhattan mansion was often President George Washington's "White House." The Franklins twice married into New York's first political dynasty, the Clintons. When the British were expelled and abandoned New York, Governor George Clinton, Sr., called the Council of the State to create a temporary government for the southern part of the State to assemble on November 21, 1783 at Guion's Tavern. The marital, social and political networks between the Franklins, Clintons, George Washington, and Guion's Tavern give credibility to Rebecca's association with fine cookery. It also gives her multiple opportunities to meet George Washington.

<sup>14</sup>The term was coined years after Gloriana's death. It aptly describes her responsibility to instruct and supervise meal selection and preparation. It is believed that Hannah Franklin trained the younger Rebecca. The term was referenced from Sarah Josepha Hale's *Early American Cookery, The Good Housekeeper, 1841* (reprinted by Dover Publications, 1996). The original 1839 publication date paralleled "Rebecca's Grocery Lists" found in St. Paul's Church cemetery ledger (1842-1850).

<sup>15</sup>Op. Cit. The Franklins were well connected to the emerging political elites in post-Revolutionary New York.

<sup>16</sup>Op. Cit. Oakley. "The Guions of Eastchester."

<sup>17</sup>John Cox, Jr.'s *Quakerism in the City of New York, 1657-1930* (originally published in 1869, reprinted in 2011 by Heritage Books) covers the society's policies, individual obligations and practices regarding slavery, emancipation, reparations, freedman education and marriage. It includes the Franklins and Clintons as prominent Quakers. Pages 54-70, and 86-95 are useful in explaining Rebecca's liberation in the first decade of the 19th century. They clarify the moral pressure on James and Gloriana to emancipate their slaves. After her husband's death she was a reluctant emancipator, doing so at her death three years before the mandatory 1827 deadline.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid. pp. 86-88. Quaker marriage practices were often applied to slaves and freed servants. They made arrangements for them to marry others of their race and status from neighboring fellow Quakers.

<sup>19</sup>How did the Turners obtain valuable land on the waterway? Were they "negro squatters" as suggested by 20th century politicians? There were several

continued on following page ►

documents illustrating Charles Guion's authority to assign perpetual leases of common lands to individuals. The 1794 and 1798 leases to Hannah Fisher and Hannah Hunt's "Garden Lott" executed for 14 and 20 years respectively by Charles Guion indicate landmarks that coincide with the Turner homestead. In a foreclosure proceeding 110 years later it was known as the "Turner Lot." The end of the Hannah Fisher's lease was 1817. The first public record of Benjamin Turner residing in Eastchester was dated 1818. It is possible that the Fisher agreement was extended to Benjamin and Rebecca Turner. Hannah Fisher had a tavern on Kingsbridge Road. It is possible that the Turners obtained the lot in 1809 at the end of the Hunt lease. Gloriana Franklin's 1810 filing of the birth of Mary Turner and reference to Rebecca as her "servant" and not "slave" could have been more than compliance with state law but may have coincided with Benjamin and Rebecca's marriage and acquisition of the expired Hunt lease. To read the Fisher option, see *Register of the Proceedings of St. Paul's Church at East Chester, June 1797 to 1834 Parish Register 1787* p.23; and *Miscellaneous Records of the Town of Eastchester New York, 1794-1834 Series I, Volume X, Section I, Report of the Commissioners of Highways 1801-1841*, p.53). For the Hunt option see *Miscellaneous Records of the Town of Eastchester New York, 1794-1834, Series I Volume X, Section II* pp.145-147.

<sup>20</sup>Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1961.

<sup>21</sup>The port of New York was the gateway for goods from distant American and foreign markets. The town general store supplied chocolate, molasses, codfish, sugar, coffee, imported tea, cinnamon, pepper and goods trucked in by wagon from New York. Herman W. Johnston recalled, "*William Gordon conducted a grocery and liquor store opposite the Village Green. The village store of 1842 had a covered porch across the front, the summer meeting place of the less energetic members of the community. Hitching posts were provided along the front and sides of the building. Everything was sold, from*

*sugar to a bolt of cloth. In 1842 money was not plentiful in East Chester, but the farmers maintained a credit at the store by bringing in eggs and vegetables in exchange for 'foreign goods.'*" *The Old Red School House of East Chester, Public School 15, Bronx, April 14, 1942*, p. 14. Julia Treacy Wintjen's *Along the Road To Bedford and Vermont* (p. 4) describes goods sold at Andrew Purdy's store near the new rail lines in the village. He was one of the three Purdy brothers who sold their farms to



Charles Guion's Tavern was popular during the colonial and revolutionary era. During the war, General George Washington was a guest. Rebecca Turner, a former slave, was a well known as a tavern cook. The building burned down in 1909. When the masonry walls were pulled down, a large number of gold coins were found.

the New Yorkers creating Mount Vernon. His 1850 store account book noted "bread, cheese, broome, candles, butter, drink of whiskey, tobacco, brown soap, 1/2 lb. of sugar, muslin, flour, mending boots, coffee, molasses, pair of shoes, pork, sheets of paper, matches..."

<sup>22</sup>This record is the partial manumission of Benjamin and Rebecca's daughter, Mary. Eastchester's *Book of the Colored People*, is in the Eastchester Town Records; a copy is at the Mount Vernon Public Library. It is also cited in "Records of Slave Manumission in New York." *Journal of Negro History*, 1941, 26:7. Gloriana was complying with 1799 laws providing for the gradual abolition of slavery, specifying that children born to a slave mother after July 4, 1799 were declared legally free—but not until male children had turned 28, and females, 25. Slaves born before that date remained in servitude, although they were redefined as indentured servants. See New York State

Archives, Series 13036-78, *Enrolled acts of the State Legislature, 1778-2005*.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>The title "Aunt" was inherited from her mother. Both Rebecca and Mary lived long lives. The first reference to her mother as "Aunt Becky" was made in 1865 by Rev. William S. Coffey, rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church. During his 57 years as rector one of the first persons he met was Rebecca Turner. She lived

behind the parish. In a speech on church and local history he made reference to "good old Aunt Becky" as a town landmark. The quotation was part of a lengthy speech published in "A Commemorative Discourse (1865)", *The Westchester Historian*, Quarterly of Westchester County Historical Society Vol. 6, No. 1 (Summer 1969): pp. 8-12. On October 20, 1895, Dr. Coffey was present for *The New York Times*' queries. He knew "Aunt Mary" for over 50 years and in 1905 buried her in the cemetery. Dr. Coffey died in 1909. Sarah Elizabeth attended his funeral.

<sup>25</sup>Op. Cit., *The New York Times*, October 20, 1895

<sup>26</sup>Marvin Kitman's *George Washington's Expense Account by George Washington*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970).

There is an entry suggesting that during the war the general was very generous to Northern slaves who gave him good service. On September 1, 1776 he makes an entry No 151 writing, "To servants at Sundry times \$327.60 cents." It was odd for a Southern slaveholder to provide cash to slaves on a regular basis. He did this throughout the war. He liberally spent his \$450,000 expense account on quality food, Madeira and domestic services. The cost of a shawl was not out of character or behavior.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid. *The New York Times*.

<sup>28</sup>"Sale of Charles Guion's Property in Eastchester," *The Westchester Spy*, January 10, 1832. Vol. 2-36. Whole No. 88. p. 3.

<sup>29</sup>The cookbook has not yet been published. It is being edited and graphically designed for a 2015 release.

<sup>30</sup>A similar 1839 notice of sale for Richard Shute's neighboring farm defined what "a quantity of good

Courtesy of Mount Vernon Public Library, Virginia Moskowitz Local History Room

In a dramatic 1934 letter to Mount Vernon politicians ending her 30-year fight to regain the "Turner Lot," Sarah Elizabeth recalled Rebecca's dinner table and unshakable faith. She wrote, "The land is in your hands, I am the last heir, the city may go right on and do what they like as before, It is now over a hundred years ago, since our dear and godly grand parents, gathered their children for family prayers, morning and evenings, and a blessing at each meal, and it was handed down to us, to me the last heir. Now I can say with boldness their God is my God. A father to the fatherless and a judge of the widows. Psalm. 68.5 and, the Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. Psalm. 23.1.

fruit” meant stating, “*Near East Chester Church...will sell at Public Auction...the Farm formerly occupied by the deceased...several apple orchards of select grafted fruit, a variety of cherry and other fruit trees, and well watered...*” (“A Farm For Sale” *The Hudson River Chronicle*, Sing Sing, N.Y. October 15, 1839. p. 3.) Florence Minnard affirmed additional evidence of apple trees on the adjoining property including School House Number One, “*Each season brought its particular season events. In the fall there were appleboards, nutting, hopsotch and swinging beneath the old apple tree.*” Op. Cit., “The Old Red School House of East Chester.”

<sup>31</sup>This relationship is inscribed on Samuel Nelson’s headstone purchased by the Fay-Griggs family and reconfirmed in a March 9, 1942 letter from Henry H. Fay to Stephen Doig during the probate proceedings for Sarah Elizabeth Nelson’s will. The letter can be found at St. Paul’s Church National Historic Site.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid. They were included in the 1850-1860 federal censuses for the Turner household.

<sup>33</sup>My cookbook used numerous citations from *Records of St. Paul’s Church Eastchester, Volume II, Deacon’s Book 1826 to 1841, and Sexton’s Book, 1842-1851*. The ledger provided a mosaic view of 19th-century Turner-Nelson family meals. The *Sexton’s Book* listed a variety of groceries received by the Turner-Nelson household as payment for cemetery and church work.

<sup>34</sup>They were neighboring households in the 1820 and 1830 federal censuses.

<sup>35</sup>Op. cit. They are reflected throughout the *Sexton’s Book*, 1842-50. A sampling is provided in the accompanying illustrated list.

<sup>36</sup>Sarah Elizabeth Nelson’s Aug. 28, 1934 letter to the County Court of Westchester and City of Mount Vernon referenced the ritual of blessing food.

<sup>37</sup>Mary Hicks-Fay. *Billy Crawford’s Tavern*, 1944, pp. 25, 27-28. The use of historical food references to reconstruct cooking and dining is a credible approach. There are only secondary sources about the taverns. The Fay-Griggs family had proprietary claims on the inn going back to the colonial period. Billy Crawford purchased the house, owning it through the Revolution to 1820, when the property returned to the Fay-Griggs family. The anecdotal references are the only glimpses of tavern meals. Samuel and Sarah Turner-Nelson worked for them for three decades. Mary Hicks-Fay repeated the story told in the 1895 *New York Times* article about Charles Guion’s wife receiving a farewell kiss from General Washington. Though Rebecca’s daughter and son-in-law were tied to the Crawford House, she did not mention “Aunt Becky’s” portion of the story. Until *Down By The Creek*, this was the last we would hear of the legend of Rebecca Turner. During Sarah Elizabeth Nelson’s 1942 probate hearings, Henry Fay, Mary’s husband, gave new biographical information about the Turner-Nelsons.

<sup>38</sup>Eastchester Town Records, April 3, 1792.

<sup>39</sup>Op. Cit., Hicks-Fay, *Billy Crawford’s Tavern*.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid. Similar descriptions are not available for Guion’s. The competitive taverns were a hundred yards apart. Guion’s was more prominent.

<sup>41</sup>Westchester County Surrogate’s Court, In the matter of proving the Last Will and Testament of Rebecca Turner, September 17, 1871.

<sup>42</sup>*Sexton’s Book*. 1844, 1847, and 1848.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid. In November 1844 there is a citation of the Turners using lard as a cooking oil.

<sup>45</sup>A stove was listed in Samuel Nelson’s will. The inventory included cash in a bank, gold and silver watches, a clock, two shotguns, a feather bed and fur-

niture. “A stove” was specifically left to Sarah Elizabeth living at the homestead. It was likely acquired in the late 1840s, while he was employed in the cemetery. His last will and testament was filed March 20, 1867, *Westchester County Surrogate’s Court* 1867 (#201).

<sup>46</sup>Records of Town of Eastchester, Volume V, Book of Strays.

<sup>47</sup>1832 State records of parents of schoolchildren helped confirm Benjamin’s death. The following year Rebecca was listed as the responsible parent. In the 1820 and 1830 census he was listed as head of the household. Benjamin never reappeared in the records. In the 1840 thru 1870 censuses Rebecca was listed as the head of household. She remained a widow until her death in 1874.

<sup>48</sup>For the impact railroads had on Eastchester, see *Next Stop Westchester! People and The Railroad* (Yonkers, N.Y.: The Hudson River Museum, 1996). The New York & Harlem Railroad, primarily a horsecar system was incorporated in 1831 to build a line on Manhattan. In 1840 the railroad’s charter was amended to allow it to build north toward Albany. In 1844 it passed through Eastchester along the Bronx River, reaching White Plains. In 1849 tracks were laid through the town toward New Haven. New transportation technology ended the town’s advantage as a gateway for stage and roadway travel to and from New York, initiating a flurry of farm sales.

<sup>49</sup>The number of live-in Irish women servants listed in the 1850-1870 town censuses reflected the mid-century wave of immigrants fleeing the Irish potato famine and poverty. In the 1870 census, Rebecca’s granddaughter, Harriet Turner lived as a domestic servant at school headmaster, Beekman Van Gasbeck’s Mount Vernon residence. He also owned Creek property adjacent to the Turner homestead. His prominent residential neighbors employed Irish women.

<sup>50</sup>Harold A. Wintjen. “The Village of Mount Vernon, New York, From 1851-1891” (Mount Vernon Public Library, Historical Pamphlet, No. 2, 1940).

<sup>51</sup>Their interments were recorded December 20, 1841 and August 3, 1849 in the *Sexton’s Book*.

<sup>52</sup>The 1850-1870 U.S. Census listed them as residing at the homestead. *Assessment Rolls, Town of Eastchester, Westchester County, NY for 1855 and 1958* lists the Turner property and tax assessments.

<sup>53</sup>Sarah Ann’s death was recorded at St. Paul’s Episcopal and Eastchester Methodist Churches. Samuel’s tombstone at St. Paul’s Cemetery confirms his date of death. He also left a will dated March 20, 1867 recorded in Westchester County Surrogate’s Court.

<sup>54</sup>Mount Vernon village was a decade old when this 1862 notice announced the potential for shipping and storage at the Creek. “*Our Predictions Fulfilled!!! The Fact Demonstrated!!! Great Excitement!!! On Saturday morning last, the inhabitants of the quiet town of Eastchester were aroused by the scream of the steam whistle, and all eyes were at once directed toward the place from whence proceeded the sound, when lo! a veritable steamboat, having in tow a barge of coal, beaved in sight, and soon landed at Lockwood’s dock. Commodore Porter, of army notoriety, successfully piloted her up without difficulty. The people swarmed from every direction to see the strange sight, but this will soon cease to be a wonder, for already, schemes are in progress which will open the way for commerce in this direction. Westchester county property will rise rapidly in value; now then is the time to buy cheap. We simply offer our suggestion, a word to the wise is sufficient.*” — *Enterprise*.” *The Village News*. Vol. 1. Mount Vernon, N. Y. December 5, 1862 no. 23. p. 1. By 1910, Creek properties were exclusively zoned for commercial and industrial purposes.

<sup>55</sup>Richardson Dilworth’s *The Urban Origins of Suburban Autonomy*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005) best explains the 1892 incorporation of Mount Vernon as a city to avoid annexation by Greater New York. It details the politics of “Greater Mount Vernon” and the infrastructural, political, economic and environmental machinations involved in its acquisition of Eastchester’s historic district, waterway and dock.

<sup>56</sup>For birth of the “Empire State and Imperial City” see Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace’s *Gotham, A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 1219-1236.

<sup>57</sup>George C. Richard. “Eastchester Creek Is Life Line of Leading Eastern Industrial Center.” *The Daily Argus*, Mount Vernon, N.Y. Wednesday, April 1, 1942. [Fiftieth Year as A City Celebration – Special Industrial Section.] Also *Mount Vernon Reference Guide of 1948 Sponsored by the Mount Vernon Board of Trade*. (Mount Vernon Public Library), pp.150-151 gives a 1946-1949 industrial list dominated by oil-related businesses.

<sup>58</sup>I was astonished to find her sister, Maria Nelson’s live birth recorded on January 27, 1849 in the sexton’s “book of the dead.” In 1931 she died in Creswell, New Jersey. From Rockland County, Sarah went to great lengths contacting Fay-Griggs descendants and officials of St. Paul’s and Asbury Methodist Churches to pressure the new Episcopal rector to grant Maria burial rights in the cemetery. There is St. Paul’s correspondence highlighting the desperate appeal. In 1941, Sarah Elizabeth died. She was 87 years old. There was no one left in the Turner-Nelson clan.

<sup>59</sup>Sarah Elizabeth Nelson’s Aug. 31, 1916 letter to Mount Vernon’s Mayor and City Council references raising chickens while protesting new city regulations prohibiting the practice in city limits. The well water was polluted, as was the creek.

<sup>60</sup>From 1920 until her health began to fail, Sarah Elizabeth cooked and cleaned for a wealthy Nyack Methodist family. She was the “nanny” for their seven children. She assigned them as executors and beneficiaries of her modest estate.

<sup>61</sup>She was a member of a Nyack Baptist church. She did not share her “Old Town” and Mount Vernon roots with anyone. Suffering from a stroke, she tried to contact Fay descendants, classmates and members of Asbury Methodist Church to leave instructions for her remains. They were too far away. The pastor of the Baptist church buried her at Mount Moor Cemetery. The enormous Palisades Shopping Mall is built around the burying ground.

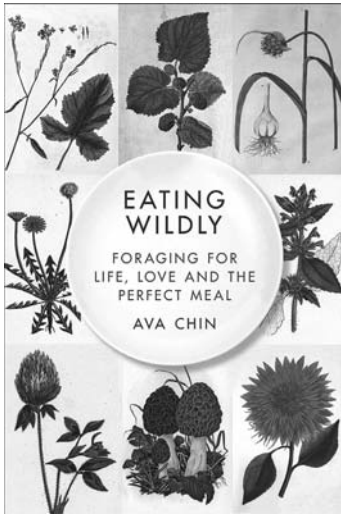
<sup>62</sup>Op. Cit., Burke 1937 foreclosure deposition. The 30-year foreclosure proceedings contained legal records focused on “Benjamin Turner, a negro squatter.” By the 1920s and 1930s Rebecca’s name was not mentioned in court cases or newspapers concerning the foreclosure. Sarah Elizabeth represented Turner claims. My cookbook excerpted those documents as “Slices of History.”

<sup>63</sup>Sarah Elizabeth Nelson’s Aug. 28, 1934 letter to County Court of Westchester and City of Mount Vernon conceded that her age and poor health did not permit her to continue fighting for the homestead. It is on file at Mount Vernon City Clerk’s office.

<sup>64</sup>In addition to the Rebecca Turner gravestone, her life story has become an important part of the Historic Site’s interpretive tour and digital program. She was to be included in Eastchester’s 350th Anniversary’s publication, *Out of The Wilderness, The Emergence of Eastchester, Tuckahoe and Bronxville, 1664-2014*. 🍏

## PUBLISHED

BOOKS BY CHNY MEMBERS, PUBLISHED IN 2014

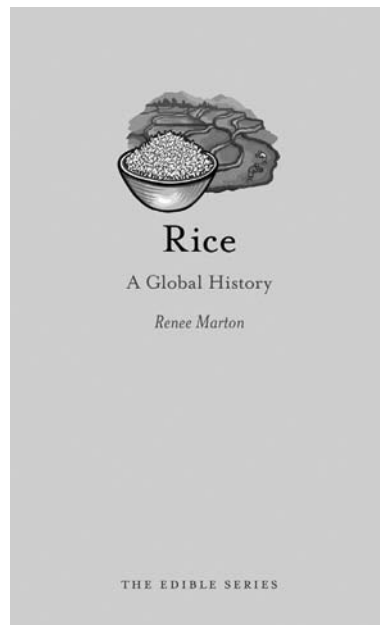


*Eating Wildly: Foraging for Life, Love and the Perfect Meal* (Simon and Schuster) by Ava Chin. Chin's food memoir details how engaging in traditional foraging practices and the DIY-food movement helped her to heal old wounds (an absent father, the loss of grandparents) and ultimately taught her lessons in self-reliance. It's also about growing up at her Chinese grandparents' kitchen table in Flushing, Queens, and the wealth of culinary and herbal knowledge that she gained there.

*The Macaroni's in the Basement* (Changing Lives Press) by Fran Claro. This recipe-laden cookbook bubbles with reminiscences of the old neighborhood and takes readers back to post-World War II Brooklyn to tell the story of the Nonne, four Italian-American grandmothers whose lives revolve around food, family and weddings. With a dash of this, a spoonful of that and a pinch of whatever, the Nonne prepare their sumptuous Old World recipes between going to Mass, smoking a Chesterfield and giving the *mal'occhio* to anyone who doesn't do things their way. Illustrated with vibrant photos, the book is a hybrid of reminiscences and cookbook, grounded in the traditions and customs of new Americans with Old World values.

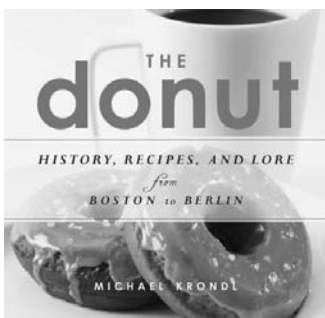


*Mallmann on Fire* (Artisan) by Francis Mallmann with Peter Kaminsky and (CHNY member) Donna Gelb. The book chronicles the international grilling adventures of Francis Mallmann, the Argentine grill master who takes readers on far-flung journeys – in winter's snow, on mountaintops, on the beach, on the crowded streets of Manhattan, on a deserted island in Patagonia, in Paris, Brooklyn, Bolinas, Brazil – each locale inspiring new discoveries as revealed in 100 recipes for meals both intimate and outsized. At every stop along the way there is something delicious to eat and a lesson to be learned about slowing down and enjoying the process, not just the result.



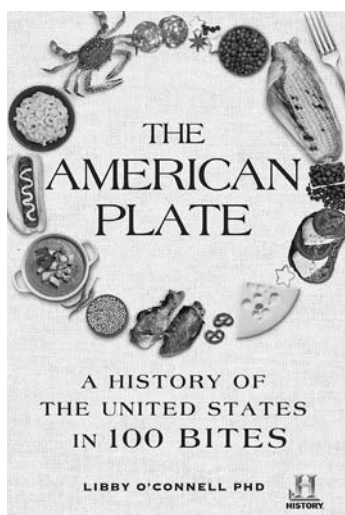
*Rice: A Global History* (Reaktion Books) by Renee Marton. While rice originated in Asia and Africa, it is now planted, harvested and consumed all over the world. This is largely thanks to the geopolitics of slavery and indentured labor, followed by more traditional immigration and the movement of foodstuffs that occurred as a result of all three. In this book, Marton chronicles many aspects of rice,

from rice in the field to rice on the plate or in the bowl, as well as the importance of rice as reflected in art, ritual, etiquette, mythology, marketing, advertising and technology. She also details the many ways that different cultures eat rice, from congee to sushi, gumbo to pilaf, paella to rice pudding and more. A sampling of tempting recipes is included.



*The Donut: History, Recipes and Lore from Boston to Berlin* (Chicago Review Press) by Michael Krondl. A highly digestible morsel of a book that explores the history (and prehistory) of donuts in Europe, the Middle East and North America. It travels the breadth and depth of the donut ecosystem, from the

heights of multinational corporations to hipster donut dives. And yes, there's a baker's dozen recipes in case you want to reproduce one version or another of humanity's favorite sweet snack.



***The American Plate:  
A Culinary History in  
100 Bites* (Sourcebook)  
by Libby O'Connell.**

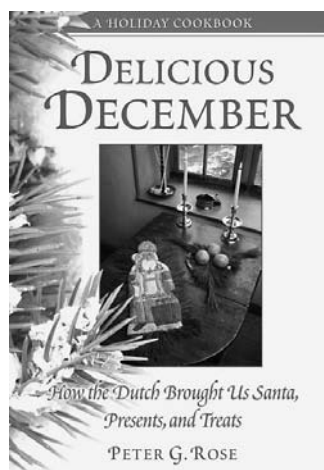
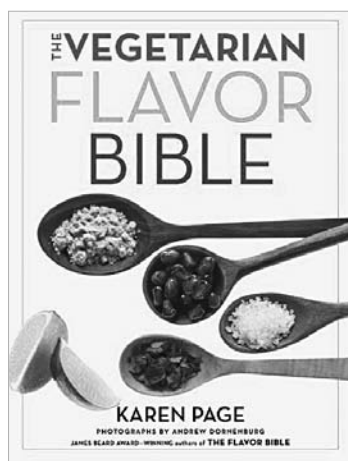
A mouthwatering history of the evolution of American food from the lead historian at The History Channel. For generations, people have proudly defined themselves and their values through their national cuisine. But American food, like its history, is a world of its

own. This book introduces modern readers to lost American food traditions and leads them on a tantalizing culinary journey through the evolution of our vibrant cuisine and culture. Covering a hundred different foods from the Native American era through today, the book features over a dozen recipes and photos.

***The Vegetarian Flavor Bible* (Little, Brown and Company)  
by Karen Page, with photography by Andrew Dornenburg.**  
*The Vegetarian Flavor Bible* is an essential guide to culinary creativity, based on insights from dozens of leading American chefs. Emphasizing plant-based whole foods including vegetables, fruits, grains, legumes, nuts and seeds, the book provides an

A-to-Z listing of hundreds of ingredients, from açai to zucchini blossoms, cross-referenced with the herbs, spices, and other seasonings that best enhance their flavor, resulting in thousands of recommended pairings. This book's first chapter is devoted to a history of vegetarianism and the key people, books and other

events that have led us to the point when eating less or even no meat is considered mainstream. It features an illustrated timeline of key events marking the history of vegetarianism and veganism (from the establishment of Hinduism through NPR's 2013 Intelligence Squared debate "Don't Eat Anything with a Face") and celebrating our infatuation with vegetables (from America's first victory gardens to the vegan restaurant Vedge being named one of *GQ*'s 10 best new restaurants).



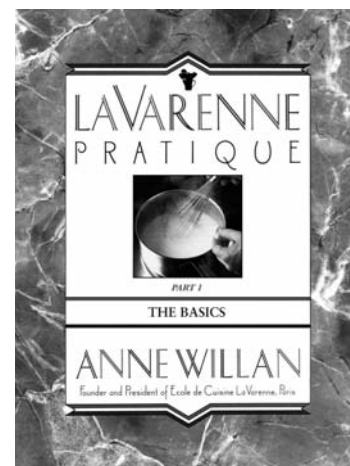
***Delicious December: How the  
Dutch Brought Us Santa, Pres-  
ents, and Treats* (SUNY Press)  
by Peter G. Rose.** Rose's new book is a celebration of Dutch and American Christmas traditions. In more than 100 tried-and-true recipes, award-winning food historian Peter G. Rose draws on traditions that date back to the Middle Ages, as well as her own reminiscences of her native country, and suggests

many ways to incorporate these true Dutch treats into American celebrations. The book describes the history and recipes of St. Nicholas Day celebrations, as well as Dutch specialties for Christmas and New Year's. Rose includes recipes for savory cookies and party treats as well as menus and recipes for the parties that might happen between the feast days. The book is divided into two parts; part one discusses the history of St. Nicholas, how he was brought to America and became Santa, and the other changes that have taken place here as well as in the Netherlands. The second part consists of 111 recipes that are easy to make and easy to love.

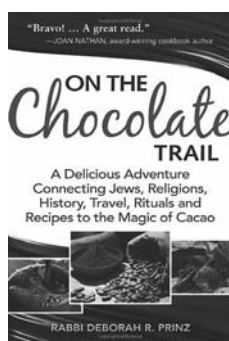
***La Varenne Pratique*  
(Anne Willan, Inc.)  
by Anne Willan.**

A digital edition of the 1989 classic, which has been out of print for some time. The digital reproduction of the original was created by scanning its 500-plus pages. The book consists of four parts, each of which includes a glossary of cooking terms, cooking equipment and a bibliography. Readers can purchase only the part or parts of greatest interest to them, or the entire volume. Each part is completely searchable, its images can be enlarged or viewed independently and formatting can be adapted (to the extent allowed by the user's e-reader). Part 1: The Basics covers

Herbs and Seasonings, Soups, Stocks and Sauces as well as Milk, Eggs and Cheese; Part 2: Meat, Poultry and Fish includes Game; Part 3: Vegetables, Pasta and Grains includes Mushrooms and Legumes; and Part 4: Baking, Preserving and Desserts also covers Fruit & Nuts and Freezing. The print edition's groundbreaking photography has been digitized and continues to illustrate each topic with detailed images of food groups and step-by-step instruction on basic to advanced cooking techniques.



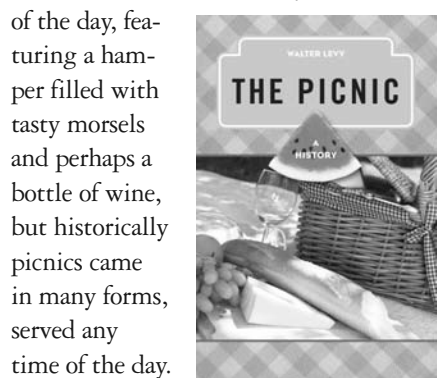
continued on following page ►



*On the Chocolate Trail: A Delicious Adventure Connecting Jews, Religions, History, Travel, Rituals and Recipes to the Magic of Cacao* (Jewish Lights Publishing) by

Rabbi Deborah Prinz. Now in its second printing, this book explores the surprising Jewish and other religious connections to chocolate in a gastronomic and historical adventure through cultures, countries, centuries and convictions. Rabbi Prinz draws from her world travels on the trail of chocolate to unravel religious connections in the early chocolate trade and shows how Jewish and other religious values infuse chocolate today. The book includes recipes, a glossary, tips for buying ethically produced chocolate, a list of chocolate museums around the world and more.

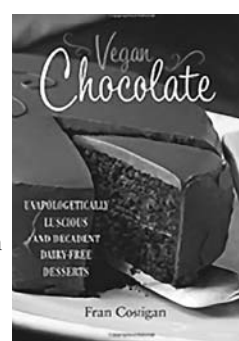
*The Picnic: A History* (Altamira Press, Rowman & Littlefield) by Walter Levy. Picnics are happy occasions and have always been a diversion from everyday cares. We think of the picnic as an outdoor meal, set on a blanket, usually in the middle



of the day, featuring a hamper filled with tasty morsels and perhaps a bottle of wine, but historically picnics came in many forms, served any time of the day. This first culinary history reveals rustic outdoor dining in its more familiar and unusual forms, the history of the word itself, the cultural context of picnics and who arranged them and, most important, the gastronomic appeal. Drawing on various media and literature, painting, music and even sculpture, Levy provides an engaging and enlightening history of the picnic.

*Vegan Chocolate: Unapologetically Luscious and Decadent Dairy-Free Desserts* (Perseus Books) by Fran Costigan. Author and vegan baking instructor

Costigan has recreated some of her favorite chocolate desserts as better-for-you vegan interpretations, including Bittersweet Chocolate Truffles, Brooklyn Blackout Layer Cake, Sacher Torte and Moon Pies! Detailed instructions make professional-quality outcomes easy. 🍌



If you will be publishing a book in 2015 and would like to share the news with your fellow CHNY members, send an announcement including the title, publisher, any co-authors, and a brief description of the book, as well as a cover image, to Managing Editor Karen Berman, at [karenberman@sbcglobal.net](mailto:karenberman@sbcglobal.net). Please send ONLY news of published books, not works in progress. The deadline is July 20, 2015.

## Banana of the sages continued from page twenty-seven

others in the African diaspora.

Long before the transatlantic slave trade, in 327 BC, Alexander the Great landed in Pakistan with a 150,000-man army and became enamored of bananas and plantains, which are different cultivars of the same plant, the plantain being starchier and drier; the banana having more moisture and sweetness.

The trade in plantains and bananas was significant in the prosperity and expansion of Southern and Central African states around 1500 AD. Some believe that Portuguese Franciscan monks first introduced them to the Caribbean island of Santo Domingo in the 1516. I wonder if this historical narrative is more popular because it affirms the platano as a European contribution. However, it has also been documented that plantains reached the Caribbean along with enslaved peoples. And many Caribbean plantain dishes are closely related to African staple foods. For example, mangú is a variant of *fufu*, a favorite in Western and Central Africa.

Even the word mangú may come from a Congolese word that refers to mashed root vegetables.

An urban legend claims that mangú got its name around 1916, during the first U.S. occupation. Dominicans offered a plate of mashed plantains to American soldiers and the soldiers said, "Men good!" The Dominicans repeated "Man gu." It's funny, but also reminds us of the denial within Dominican culture of its African roots.

In 2013, the Dominican Republic won the World Baseball Classic without losing a single game and headlines announced "Platano Power." If platano was once a slur, it's now a source of pride, a symbol of resilience.

Today the plantain is considered a super-food. It contains more dietary fiber, and less sugar than its cousin the banana. It is also a great source of vitamin C, Vitamin A, B6 and potassium, which makes it an excellent food for weight control and suitable for diabetics. It's no wonder that the plantain once had a botanical name *Musa sapientium*, which

translates into "banana of the sages."

\*\*\*

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Plantains were introduced as a staple food for 'pigs and slave' (Vega, 1986) during Hispaniola's colonization.

<sup>2</sup>Our vegetables are mostly plantains, yams, beans, and Indian corn." *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*.

\*\*\*

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Equiano, Olaudah, The Project Gutenberg EBook of *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, The African*, March 17, 2005, <https://archive.org/stream/theinterestingn15399gut/15399.txt>

Marte, Lidia, "Migrant Seasonings: Food Practices, Cultural Memory, and Narratives of 'home' among Dominican Communities in New York City," <https://www.lib.utexas.edu/etd/d/2008/martel79117/martel79117.pdf>, p. 3.

Vega, Bernardo, 1981 "La Herencia Indígena en la Cultura Dominicana de Hoy." Museo del Hombre Dominicano, Series Conferencias, No. 10, Sto. Dgo. Rep. Dom.

"The Latin Kitchen," <http://thelatinlitchen.com/article/history-plantain-recipes>.

"Garden Betty," <http://www.gardenbetty.com/2012/01/a-banana-by-any-other-name/#J5LFY5XMaGFF1GD6.99>

"El Valle de Anton, Panama," <http://elvalleinformatio.wordpress.com/bananas-and-plantains/>.

Raw-Food-Health," <http://www.raw-food-health.net/Plantains.html>. 🍌

## Banana of the sages

For New York's Dominican community, the plantain was more than just another fruit

By Angie Cruz

MY MOTHER AND TIAS WATCHED THE PRICE OF A PLATANO, BULL AND BEAR, LIKE BANKERS FOLLOWING THE STOCK MARKET. Even during the hardest economic times in my family's history, platanos were served pretty much with every meal.

A meal felt incomplete without them. The platano – plantain in English – was a sign of home. In fact, it is believed that Dominicans in New York, sick with nostalgia and desire to return to their country, eat them in greater proportions than Dominicans back home.

Lidia Marte, in her doctoral dissertation, “Migrant Seasonings: Food Practices, Cultural Memory, and Narratives of ‘home’ among Dominican Communities in New York City,” uses the term “migrant seasonings” referring to “the creative contestation and agency of these Afro-Caribbean populations as they seasoned their food, lives and homes in relation to colonial and post-colonial situations.”

In our house, in the morning the green ones were served with *bacalao* or scrambled eggs, with onions and tomatoes, fried cheese, salami, or canned tuna, sautéed with fresh tomatoes, peppers and onions. They were sometimes boiled, then mashed into a *mangú*. My mother would soften them into a purée with the saltwater they were cooked in, my grandmother used margarine, my aunt, olive oil. Every woman in my family cooked with nostalgia, conjuring up whatever they could from a land they planned to return to as soon as they saved enough money to do so. Red onions were sautéed with salt and vinegar and lumped over the *mangú* right before serving. For snack, they would fry me up a ripe platano and smear it with cheese. For dinner they would double-fry the green plantains into *tostones*. If you mash the *tostones* and add some fried pork



Photo by Edwin Martinez

More than a tasty dish, the plantain is a cultural symbol for New York's Dominican population.

you have *mofongo*. Platanos completes the classic *sancocho* (a soup of everything) and is the base vegetable for *el pastelón*, the Dominican version of a lasagna stuffed with ground meat or cheeses. Platano is also the key ingredient for the festive *pasteles*, our version of tamales.

According to Marte, “This former slave<sup>1</sup> cuisine (plantains) and present working class fare is a good example of a Dominican food whose meaning and prestige is shifting through the new experiences of Dominicans in NYC. In the new localities it is becoming one of the main indexes of Dominicanity chosen even to name Dominican neighborhoods such as ‘Platano City’ and ‘Mangú Heights’ (Washington Heights in Manhattan).”

I grew up in “Platano city” or “Mangú Heights.” For most of my childhood we were called platanos. We were new, off the plane. The men stood out because they wore high water pants and socks with no shoes on and the women packed themselves in brightly colored *chicles*, – what are now called jeggings. Platano was a mean-spirited, derogatory term originating with Dominicans who immigrated in the ‘60s and were perhaps more interested in assimilating and maintaining a distinct distance from African Americans, Puerto Ricans and from Dominicans like us, who came to America in search of a better life

economically, unlike earlier immigrants who were fleeing from the brutal Trujillo dictatorship.

Though not a staple in the United States or Europe, platanos are a huge part of diets in Africa, Southern and Central America and parts of Asia. Between 2000 and 2002, 25 million plantains were produced, of which 89 percent were consumed in Africa—they’re a staple food for 70 million Africans.

The first time I saw the word plantain in print was as a college student, in the slave narrative, *The Interesting Narrative Of The Life Of Olaudah Equiano*.<sup>2</sup> Equiano listed plantains as a staple in his diet. I learned that plantains had migrated to the Caribbean during the 15th and 16th centuries, during slavery, as an inexpensive, nutritious food. In the 1620s, more than 30,000 plantains were imported annually to Cartagena, Cuba, and then distributed throughout the Caribbean. In many ways the platano served as a bridge between me, as a descendent of the Dominican Republic, and the continent of Africa. Seeing the word “plantain” in the slave narrative was the impetus for me to deconstruct false mythologies that essentially erased slavery from the Dominican historical experience. This eventually allowed me to build bridges and alliances with

◀ continued on previous page

Angie Cruz is the author of two novels, *Soledad* and *Let It Rain Coffee*. She teaches creative writing at the University of Pittsburgh and is the editor of *asterixjournal.com*.



Courtesy of St. Paul's Church and Cemetery National Historic Site Archives, National Parks Service

A photograph of the Old Village Green in Eastchester, New York, taken during the Civil War. St. Paul's Church and its cemetery are visible in the background; behind the church is the site of the homestead of Rebecca Turner, a former slave known in the town for her cooking during the 19th century. CHNY Scholar's Grant recipient Larry H. Spruill writes of his research into her life and foodways on page one.

# NYFOODSTORY

*The Journal of the Culinary Historians of New York*

## VISIT US

[www.culinaryhistoriansny.org](http://www.culinaryhistoriansny.org)

## JOIN US

For information on membership,  
visit [www.culinaryhistoriansny.org/join.html](http://www.culinaryhistoriansny.org/join.html)

## FOLLOW US

On Facebook: [www.facebook.com/CulinaryHistoriansNY](http://www.facebook.com/CulinaryHistoriansNY)

On Twitter: @CulinaryHistNY

On Instagram: <http://instagram.com/culinaryhistoriansny>

## WRITE TO US

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