

Culinary Historians of Ontario

Spring 1999

Number 20



UNA ABRAHAMSON, 1922 - 1998 Greatest Collection of Cookery Books in Canada

Una Abrahamson loved cookery books.

When she died on February 28, she had over **3000** of them, the earliest dating to 1616, covering all aspects of cookery. Of particular strength is the Canadian cook books.

In a 1985 assessment, Toronto antiquarian bookdealer Donald Lake wrote that "unquestionably [it is] the greatest collection of cookery books every assembled in Canada, institutionally or **otherwise**". She bequeathed it to the University of Guelph, already home to an astonishing array of cookery and agricultural books, and food ephemera.

Abrahamson came to Ontario as an English warbride. She started as a student of social history, became a housewife with an interest in cooking, then by happen-stance became **food columnist** at *Chatelaine* and from there went on to be a senior **executive** at General Foods and Dominion Stores. In 1978 she was hit by a car running a red light. She spent the following year in a coma; 5 operations and 7 years later she left hospital. She had to relearn to **speak** and write, although she remained in a wheelchair. **But** through it all she collected her books with **discrimination** -- she was a true collector.

Una Abrahamson knew and used her

cookery books. They were the source material for many, many articles and several books. Her first and best known was **God Bless This Home: Domestic Life in 19th Century Canada** (1967).

Doris Anderson was editor of *Chatelaine* during Abrahamson's time. During a CBC Radio One interview, Anderson said Abrahamson was a witty, wonderful person who helped pioneer culinary history in Canada and who welcomed feminism when it was still "women's lib".

Once it's catalogued -- expected to be done by the autumn -- The Una Abrahamson Canadian Cookery Collection will be available in the Rare Book Room of the **McLaughlin Library** at the University of Guelph. This is an extraordinary legacy to Canada.

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Culinary Cupboard

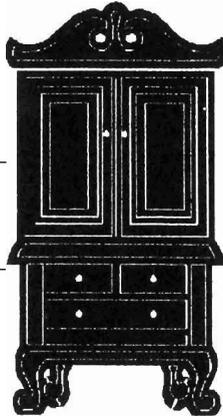
Jill Downie, *Storming the Castle: Dora and the Duchess*, (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1998)

A colourful, richly detailed and fully documented account of the lives of British chef Dora Lee -- one of the very few women personally trained by Escoffier -- and Evelyn, 9th Duchess of Devonshire. Their lives intersected for 4 ½ years in Ottawa, from November 1916 to May 1921, when Dora was cook during the Devonshires' tenure as Canada's vice-regal couple. It's a thoroughly enjoyable read. The main primary sources were Evelyn's letters, the Duke's diary and Dora's trunk of extraordinary mementoes (postcards, photos, menus, notes, artifacts like her chefs hat) of her professional culinary career. Dora settled in Ontario, but revealed little of her history in service to her children, although they always loved her cooking. She even made her own puff paste. My main quibble is about Downie's social commentary; sometimes there's too much, accompanied by so much Edwardian name-dropping that I sometimes forgot who the book was really about! Nevertheless, *Storming the Castle* is to be recommended.

James Chatto, *The Man Who Ate Toronto; Memoirs of a Restaurant Lover* (Toronto: Madarlane Walter and Ross, 1998)

These memoirs gave me a great deal of pleasure to read. I've followed the wonderfully rich and complicated tale of Toronto's chefs and restaurants for several years now, but was delighted to learn much that I was unaware of, particularly of the 50s and 60s. Chatto's writing is personal, joyful and witty, although sometimes gently ironic and even a little bit sarcastic. He is very observant, asks many questions of the chefs and passes on their answers and comments with his thoughtful commentary. I particularly liked the small section called "The Young Idea", which is an imaginary conversation between himself and his 10 month old daughter on taking children into, and educating them about, going to restaurants. A wonderful homage to the flourishing restaurant scene in Toronto from the well-travelled, respected and prolific food critic of *Toronto Life*, James Chatto.

Fiona Lucas, CHO



Casselman, Bill. *Canadian Food Words*. Toronto: McArthur & Company, 1998. ISBN 1-55278-018-x

Witty, refreshing and widely entertaining, this book provides an etymological tour of Canadian food terms. Casselman tells us in his introduction that "he aims to set the gastric juices flowing" by providing readers an insight (historical and anecdotal) into some of the food words Canadians love to use.

Woodhead, Eileen. *Early Canadian Gardening: An 1827 Nursery Catalogue*.

Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998.

ISBN 0-7735-1731-6

If my mother hadn't been so observant by reading the back pages of her most recent gardening magazine, this gem might be considered the most over-looked book of the year. This reproduction of a rare 1827 plant and seed catalogue is destined to fill many CHO bookshelves. Woodhead provides a detailed analysis and brief history of the cultivation and use of plants and seeds available during this period. Outstanding!

Christine Ritsma, CHO

Mrs. Maria Eliza Rundell, *A New System of Domestic Cookery* 1806 (Youngstown, New York, Fort Niagara Edition 1998) Edited by R. Arthur Bowler.

It was exciting to hear *A New System of Domestic Cookery* was going to be reprinted. Maria Eliza Rundell otherwise known as *A Lady* is one of those authors/cooks that I would like to meet. R.A. Bowler in his edited reprint of this 1806 edition is sensitive to the nature of the original cookbook. He includes in his introduction a wonderful glimpse into Rundell's world and you're reminded of the sentimental and practical reasons for the writing of her book. Open and down hearth cooking techniques are explained in a fairly clear way and the needs of an early 19th century kitchen from equipment to foodstuffs is described. The glossary is a nice addition and is helpful in the reading and interpretation of the recipes. The best part of all is the reprint itself. It's always a joy for me to know that another reprint is being distributed out there. Bowler tries very hard to be faithful to the original 1806 edition. I believe he has been successful in achieving "a reprint, without substantive correction."

Bridget Wranich, CHO

"GIVE US OUR DAILY BREAD"

Today is Monday and it's washday. Between lugging water and sorting clothes, between scrubbing and rinsing and bluing and starching, between hauling mounds of wet clothes out to the line and braving cold spring winds; I must find time to boil some potatoes and make hop tea to start my leavening for baking on Friday.

Wait a minute, planning for **baking** day five days ahead? Yeah, right! Well, maybe 100 years ago, but I sure am glad I can decide to make bread for supper at two o'clock in the afternoon and have it on the table for five-thirty. I don't have to worry about tempermental yeast, questionable flours, and or bake ovens.

However, there are a number of enthusiasts working in museums in this province, who have access to bake ovens, hearths and wood stoves, that insist on doing it the historic way. About thirty of these people met at historic Joseph Schneider House in **Kitchener**, on April 10, for another great **CHO** workshop and to share experiences about baking and working with historic yeasts. **And** to eat! (Members who are unable to take advantage of these get-togethers miss out on some superb food, bread, cakes, and other **tasties**, usually from historic recipes of a kind one rarely can experience in today's market.)

Ten speakers shared their expertise, experience, experiments, and successes in all aspects of the subject, from making the leaven for bread to building the bake oven in which to bake the bread. The amount of knowledge and information shared by the

speakers, and listeners, reassures one that the art of historic baking is not lost. The achievement in discovering and mastering these techniques is an accomplishment on its own. This stuff is fun. To demonstrate this activity in a living history museum setting and to involve school children, whose perspective is so far removed **from** this era, is even more **gratifying**.

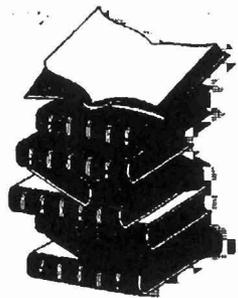
Of course, Schneider House's newly reconstructed bake /**schnitz** /**smoke** house with a garden room made this the ideal setting to have this workshop. (See **CHO** newsletter #19.) The fire in the bake oven was lit and fed for about two hours. We discussed and experimented how to judge the readiness of the oven. We waited in anticipation while **shoofly** and apple **schnitz** pies cooked to perfection. Then we ate again.

I haven't made bread for ages. I was so enthused, I got out my trusty **Fleishmann's** yeast, turned on my electric stove, and made bread in somewhat less time than needed a century ago. We ate fresh bread for supper!

Barbara Vranic is a **CHO** member and now a bread baking enthusiast.



18th Century Cookbooks & Growth of the Middle Class



The author of the following article is Tracy Macdonnell. He wrote this as a paper for a material culture course at McMaster University, Hamilton. He's an historical interpreter at Historic Fort York and a fellow culinary historian. (He makes a mean Portugal cake!)

The 18th century was a period of unprecedented prosperity for many parts of English society. As the century progressed, the upper class, and increasing segments of the middle class, were able to divert larger proportions of their wealth to creature comforts such as larger homes and more comfortable and decorative furnishings. Included in this improvement in material culture was the increased specialization of cookery. The record provided by published works and household journals shows three separate, yet parallel, developments that illustrate this evolution in the culinary art. First, despite centuries of political antipathy, England became influenced by the advances of French culture. Though never comfortable with this trend, English cookery adopted, in a modified fashion, more **refined** French cuisine. Second, as the century progressed the middle classes of England expected a greater diversity in the preparation and presentation of their foods. Third, in an attempt to serve the market better, publishers greatly improved the internal structure of cookbooks.

B. Cookbooks as Sources

The use of cookbooks as a source of 18th century material culture presents a number of interesting questions and challenges. In and of their nature, 18th century cookbooks can not represent contemporary practice. Only with the advent of modern wealth and ease, along with advanced communication, could they become part of a cultural *avant garde*. Cookbooks of the 18th century could only record what worked, what was successful, since the process of food preparation required a number of years to test and prove a sufficient number of recipes.¹ It was also no coincidence that most authors had worked for wealthy families or successful taverns, since no cook **could** independently **afford** to set new trends. Thus cookbooks predicated an individual, or individuals, wealthy enough to be experimented upon.² The implication for a student of material culture is that the book itself most likely represents modes of cooking and tastes that predate the book's publication. There is no guarantee that what is in the book actually represents contemporary practice, with the possible

exception of cookbooks that went through multiple printings. Books such as Eliza Smith's *Complete Housewife* and Hannah Glasse's *Art of Cookery* went through enough editions to assume that the contents of these books maintained a continuous public appeal³

Cookbooks also leave unanswered the question of how much their recipes and table settings were actually put into use, particularly at the middle class level. As with any collection of cookbooks found in a modern home, there must have been numerous recipes that never saw the light of day. Thus, as collections of recipes these books can only represent the general universe of possibility at their time of collection, rather than actual practice at time of publication. Only by comparing recipes with other contemporary primary sources can a sense of a diet or culinary regime be constructed.

A final limitation of cookbooks as 18th century sources is their obvious class bias. At the start of the 1700's cookbooks were still the preserve of professional cooks who catered to the wealthy and **powerful**. It is only in the second quarter of the century that books began to cater to the middle classes, and only near the end that they were widely **published**.⁴

C. French Cuisine in England

*When mighty roast beef was the Englishman's food
It ennobled our hearts, and enriched our blood;
Our soldiers were brave, and our Courtiers were good
O' the Roast Beef of Old England,
and O' for Old England's Roast Beef.*

Henry Fielding, Don Quixote in England⁵

Fielding's "Roast Beef" is a good example of English cultural propaganda from the 18th century. In matters culinary, England was a nation grown to prominence based, in no small part, on plain down home cooking.⁶ The reality was somewhat more equivocal for the upper classes, the distance from French cuisine being more a matter of fancy than of fact.

English cookbooks of the late 17th and early 18th centuries clearly show a much more cosmopolitan flavour than popular propaganda would indicate. "Portugal Broth", "Cuscasooee of Capons or Pullets", "Olio Podreda or Spanish Olio", and "Rich Goslings Turkish Dish Called a Cubob", all indicate the extent to which English cuisine could accept foreign influence.⁷ Yet if there was one nation that influenced 18th century English cooking, it was France.

From the beginnings of its national **cuisine** in the mid 1600's France would come to hold a pre-eminent position in European cooking.' French cookery and **dining** styles were imitated in upper class England from the dishes themselves to the order of service at dinner. Typically, the English imitation was a somewhat more subdued version of the French style, but it was French nonetheless. Where French dinners ran to four or more courses, the English upper classes contented themselves with two or three. Suggested menus found in cookbooks such as Eliza Smith, John Farley, William **Augustus** Henderson, 'and Madam Johnson lay out suggested two course meals for each month of the year. J. **Perkins** and later versions of Hannah Glasse give suggested three course meals, reflecting the growing acceptance of French influence in English dining? The composition of the dishes changed as well, reflecting the simplification of French dishes.

English cookery simplified food preparation and spicing as the century progressed. This trend can be seen in three rabbit pie recipes. Robert May's "To Bake Four **Hares** in a Pye" (1660) has the boned hares larded with spiced bacon and then heavily seasoned with four ounces each of pepper and nutmeg, and eight of salt. Once placed in the pie they are covered with lard, whole cloves and saffron. The baked pie then is filled with clarified butter. Charles Carter's "Hare or Rabbit Pie" (1730) does not bother to bone the hares, leaves the amount of the spices to the **cook**, adds ginger and thyme to the mix, and omits the saffron and the second batch of lard. By the time Eliza Smith publishes her **Complete Cook** in 1758 her "To Make a Hare Pye" has re-introduced boning the hare, added some pork, reduced spicing to unspecified amounts of pepper, salt, and "spice", and completely omitted the lard and clarified butter.¹⁰

One possible explanation of these changes in preparation is that tastes simply changed. But as Stephen **Mennell** has pointed out, this argument is subjective at best and begs the question: why did tastes change? One likely argument is that as the middle class increased its disposable income the upper class found it increasingly **difficult** to maintain the traditional class barriers, and so turned to cultural rather than statutory differences. Since the volume of food and spices eaten by the wealthy could no longer be the defining characteristic of upper class meals, preparation and presentation came to be the mark of refined society." It was this barrier that the middle class attempted to overcome in the mid-18" century.

D. Cookbooks and the Improvement in Lifestyle

Perhaps the strongest argument in support of a general improvement in middle and upper class standards of

living comes in the form of the explosion of published works directed towards the middle class and its servants. The increasing alternative methods of preserving fruits and vegetables, the number of recipes **offered from** one edition to the next, and the number of editions of a particular work, all tend to indicate that as the century progressed more people could **afford** to spend more time and effort on their dinners. When Charles Carter published his **Complete Practical Cook** in 1730 he included a total of 23 recipes that could be used to preserve fruits and vegetables. By 1800, when John **Farley** published the 9th edition of his **London Art of Cookery, and Housekeeper's Complete Assistant**, he was able to include 51 recipes that involved **pickling** or preserving the **same items**.¹² These recipes reflected a growing desire to be able to enjoy soft **fruits** and vegetables throughout the year, even though they would not be anything like the fresh article. In plain terms of total recipes it **can** be seen that there was much more demand for cookbooks. The terms "revised" and "enlarged" came to be regular parts of the title page of most **multi-edition** books. Eliza Smith's 1758 edition of **The Compleat Housewife** contained 235 pages of non-medical recipes. By 1773 this number had increased to 280 pages. Likewise, Glasse's **The Art of Cookery** increased **from** 337 to 375 pages between the years 1767 and 1796. Essentially, as the market for cookbooks increased publishers engaged in a culinary race, each vying with the other to produce ever more comprehensive lists of recipes presented in the latest fashion.

Larger cookbooks beget larger markets, and as previously noted, there were some phenomenal success **stories**.¹³ What they all held in common, apart **from** pirated recipes, was their middle class focus. Eliza Smith **marks** the beginning of this middle class trend when she stated "...here are those [dishes] proper for a frugal, and also a sumptuous table. [1758, pg. V] By 1767, Hannah Glasse notes explicitly that her book is for the use of a lady's cook. [1767, pg. V] The end of the century saw the possible market widening even **further** so that John **Farley** could claim to write for "all ranks in general" both "the Peer or the Mechanic". [pg. V] Jacob Schnebblic, the later editor of Henderson's work, claimed, "The receipts for each article are formed on so easy and cheap a plan, as to be within the purchase of all ranks of people." [**Henderson**, pg. 4] These books certainly claimed to be aimed at a much wider audience, and even if the recipes were not within the reach of all ranks, they certainly appealed to enough people to warrant multiple editions.

This article will be published in 3 parts and will be included in the next two CHO newsletters.

Continued in Summer 1999. Number 21 issue

BACK ISSUES

To order any of these back issues, please contact Christine at (519) 272-1949. Each back issue is \$2.00, including postage. The Culinary Calendar on the last page of each issue is not listed here, and neither is the Culinary Club.

SPRING 1994 ♦ number 1

- p 1 Welcome to Our Inaugural Issue
- p 2 **Maccaroni** Soup
- p 3 Patsy **Beeson**; illustration: Dolly of the Chophouse

AUTUMN 1994 ♦ number 2

- p 1 **Thanks** for the Enthusiastic Response
- p 2 **Soft** Gingerbread with Fruit
- p 3-4 Edna Staebler
- p 4 2 cook books donated to CHO
- p 5 illustration: lemon; Women's Culinary Network

WINTER 1995 ♦ number 3

- p 1 summary of inaugural meeting
- p 2 Cream Nectar, Hot Italian
- p 3 Paul **Fortier**
- p 4 "Perpetually Wanted in Cookery": Lemons in 19th century Ontario, part 1
- p 5 **sace**; more on 2 cook books donated to CHO

SPRING 1995 ♦ number 4

- p 1 Tour of Refinery at **Redpath** Sugar Museum
- p 2 Lemon **Puddings**
- p 3 Elizabeth Driver
- p 4 "Perpetually Wanted in Cookery": Lemons in 19th century Ontario, part 2
- p 5 stoneground flour; Cuisine Canada

SUMMER 1995 ♦ number 5

- p 1 We Want to Hear Your Voices
- p 2 Citron Preserves
- p 3 Carol Ferguson
- p 4 "**Perpetually** Wanted in Cookery": Lemons in 19th century Ontario, parts 3 & 4
- p 5 bake ovens; National Capital **Freenet**

AUTUMN 1995 ♦ number 6

- p 1 **Niagara** Hosts a "Viticultural Revolution"
- p 2 Wine Biscuit, To Mull Wine
- p 3 Jo Marie Powers
- p 4 Culinary Historians of ...; Battlefield House
- p 5 Harvest Home at **Dundurn** Castle; muscovado sugar

WINTER 1996 ♦ number 7

- p 1 "From Rations to Riesling: Remembering Ontario's Food Heritage"
- p 2 Scotch Haggis
- p 3 Bob Wildfong: "Leaven from Heaven"
- p 4 moose mouffle
- p 5 curry; closure of Ontario Agricultural Museum

SPRING 1996 ♦ number 8

- p 1 "From Rations to Riesling: Remembering Ontario's Food Heritage"
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- p 3 Sandy Oliver
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- p 5 *Voices from the Garden*; Edible Culture

SUMMER 1996 ♦ number 9

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- p 3 Dorothy Duncan
- p 4 moose mouffle **cont.**
- p 5 orgeat; *The Charms of Tea* newsletter; **Myrtleville** House Museum; Fort Henry

AUTUMN 1996 ♦ number 10

- p 1 **future** plans for CHO; illustration: Canadian Baker and *Confectioner*, December 1933
- p 2 Birthday Syllabub
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- p 4-5 H. Sproutt: Ginger Beer Maker

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 p 2 asparagus
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 p 3 Rose Murray
 p 4-5 Get to Know Your Bake Oven
 p 6 Portugal Cakes
 p 7 Bordyke Bread



Yeast

A Lady (Mrs. Maria **Eliza** Rundell), *A New System of Domestic Cookery*, (London: J. Murray, Fleet Street and J. Harding, St. James's Street, 1806), pg. 229.

Original Recipe

“**Thicken** two quarts of water with fine flour, about three **spoonfuls** - boil half an hour, sweeten with near half a pound of brown sugar; when near cold, put into it four spoonfuls of **fresh** yeast in a jug, shake it well together, and let it stand one day to ferment near the fire without being covered. There will be a thin liquor on the top, which must be poured **off**, shake the remainder, and cork it up for use. Take always four spoonfuls of the old to ferment the next quantity, keeping it always in succession.

A half peck loaf will require about a gill.”

*peck- dry measure of 2 gallons *gill - ¼ of pint, ½ cup

Modern Equivalent

3 tbsps.	white flour	50 mL
2 qts.	water	2 L
1¼ cups	brown or demerara sugar	315 mL
2 tbsps.	dry ale or beer yeast	25 mL
	OR	
4 tbsp.	this yeast from previous batch	50 mL

Whisk flour into water. Boil flour and water for about ½ an hour. Remove **from** heat. Dissolve demerara sugar in boiling water. Cool to lukewarm (about 1 hour). Whisk yeast into lukewarm sugar water. Allow to ferment overnight in a warm place without a cover. Next morning, discard the layer of thin liquid floating on top of a thick layer of yeast by gently pouring it off. Shake fermented yeast that remains. Pour into 2 or 3 sterilized beer bottles about ¾ full, and cork. Store in a cool place. (**refrigerator**) Yield: 1 ½ - 2 ½ cups (375 mL- 625 mL) of thick froth. Before using, pour off layer of thin liquid that has risen in bottle; use only thick yeast layer. Retain 4 tbsp. (50 mL) for next recipe.



Culinary Calendar

Please send CHO information about your upcoming food history or related events. We are pleased to include them in the newsletter.

May

Tankards, Tureens, & Crawly Things Tavern and Tableware in 18th Century Europe *The George R. Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art*

March 5 to May 16 (416) 586-8080

Enjoy a fascinating glimpse into the eating habits of the European merchant class. Tues. 10 - 8 pm, (free admission) Wed.-Sat. 10 - 5 pm, Sun. 11-5 pm

Mid 19th Century Chocolate

Colbome Lodge, Toronto (416) 392-6910

May 22 11:00 - 3:00 pm

Cost \$45 + gst Pre-registration required.

Heritage Plant Sale

Doon Heritage Crossroads, Kitchener (519) 748-1914

May 22 10:00 - 4:30 pm

Scotch Tasting

Mackenzie House, Toronto (416) 392-6827 ext.265

May 28 7:00 - 9:00 pm

Explore the nature of this popular beverage and enjoy finger foods too. Cost \$40 Pre- registration required.

Early 20th Century Chocolate

Spadina (416) 392-6910

May 29 11:00 - 3:00 pm

Cost \$45, pre-registration required.

Plant Sale

Heritage Herbs, St. George (519) 448-1075

May 29 & 30 10:00 -3:00 pm

Heritage and modern varieties of herbs & vegetables. Quantities of some varieties limited.

June

Crossing Borders: Food and Agriculture in the Americas

Hosted by the Toronto Food Research Network and is being organized by a team of faculty and students from Ryerson Polytechnic University, University of Guelph, University of Toronto, and York University,

Conference includes keynote speakers **Philip McMichael & Anita Stewart** *Great Canadian Cuisine*, panels, papers, Knives and Forks Dinner, A Day of Food Films, and tours of Toronto's restaurants, museums and attractions.

June 3 - 6 For registration information 416 979-5135.

Herbal Tea, Talk & Tour

Heritage Herbs, St. George (519) 448-1075

June 19 1:00 - 3:00 pm

This month is the Salad Garden, herbal myths and legends as well as how to grow your own greens.

Strawberry Social

Spadina (416) 392-6910

June 19 12:00 - 4:00 pm



Enjoy our annual garden party based on one the Austin family hosted in 1901. Strawberry shortcake, strawberry pies, tarts, and more. Admission \$2.

July

Dairy Day July 4

Fabulous Cookies July 25

10:00 - 4:30 pm

Doon Heritage Crossroads (519) 748-1914

Herbal Tea, Talk & Tour

Heritage Herbs (519) 448-1075

July 17 1:00 - 3:00 pm

Learn about growing & using herbs, herbal folklore and more.

Summer on the Farm

Weekends in July

The Gibson House Museum (416) 395-7432

Pickling, preserving, drying, salting are just a few of the methods 19th century housewives employed to prepare the summer harvest for winter use.

12:00 - 5:00 pm

Culinary Credits

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Thanks for this issue to Barbara Vranic & Tracy Macdonnell

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