

## Fasting and Feasting Today?

By Bridget Wranich co-founder, and René Malagón



Attitudes and approaches toward fasting and feasting vary greatly from group to group and over time. Societies may evolve from hunter-gatherer to agricultural to industrial or even "post-industrial" but there are always formal and informal "rules" associated with the production and consumption of food. Most people in today's fast paced society don't think of their eating habits based on vague, old fashioned food "rules" and with ancient fasting and feasting days. However, if you look closely, people do react when they hear of someone who eats ice cream for breakfast or orders in pizza for Christmas dinner. Why do these things bother us? It's because we have in our mind a set of "rules" for what is appropriate on these occasions. Traditionally what was considered appropriate was handed down from the temple or the church. Today it is more likely based on our changing notions of culture, season, etiquette and health.

Fasting, in a strict definition, implies the total giving up of food and drink for a given period. Another level of fasting is abstinence, which usually suggests the giving up of specific foods or drinks for a prescribed period. **An** example of this would be the traditional abstinence of red meat on Fridays for Roman Catholics, although many people use the word fasting to describe this behavior. Abstinence also can imply the temporary suspension of other types of enjoyable or indulgent behavior such as smoking tobacco or sexual activity.

Feasting, on the other hand, is a celebration in which a specific food or drink is harvested, prepared and served in an elaborate or highly ritualistic and prescribed manner. The various steps in the preparation and serving of the food and drink are usually tied into a symbolic representation of the event being celebrated. For example, Easter foods such as eggs and lamb are reflective of the ending of the Lenten fast and the celebration of rebirth, new life and the coming of spring.

There is **often** a period of abstinence before the day of celebration and feasting, especially as seen in many religious observances. **The feasting** can be a solemn and serious occasion or it may be a celebration enjoyed with great gusto, drinking and merry making. The two approaches are not always mutually exclusive; they can be integrated into different components of the same feast or celebration.

This may seem somewhat removed from our modern day secular society. Today, most people in Canada do not fast, in the strict meaning of the word. This is partially due to the decline in our participation in organized religion and because many believe that a complete fast is not good for your health. Various forms of abstinence, for religious or cultural factors, are more common. There can also be a political facet to this type of behavior. Those who wish to exert non-violent, political pressure in a public manner may undertake a hunger strike. Those who undertake this activity hope that the publicity of their "sacrifice" will result in public pressure and sympathy towards their cause.

Today many people "fast" or at least abstain, **from** food that they crave but this behavior is now called dieting. We abstain **from** various types of food and drink with the hope of losing weight or simply to maintain a healthier lifestyle. Some diet out of medical necessity. Our society is so concerned with dieting that the food manufacturers have filled this need by developing fat and sugar free products. Almost everything today comes in a "light" version. **An** entire industry is trying to aid us in our abstinence, with none of the personal sacrifice. Feasting on the other hand comes quite easy for us. We are festive not only for holidays but also to demonstrate our wealth and sophistication on a personal or even political level. Fundraising dinners (feasts) for political parties or personalities is an established practice.

Does a feast mean more if it follows a fast? It seems likely. There must be a greater appreciation for the food set in front of you after denying yourself. Today many of us feel a little guilty after a big feast. We feel we don't deserve it, after all, there has been no real fast.

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# Cookery Collection



## To Stew Pears

Hannah Glasse, *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy*, London, 1796, pg. 221.

### Background:

When you read the title of chapter XVI for **Lent, or a Fast Dinner** tucked near the back of Hannah Glasse's cookbook, where this recipe originates, you may think the recipes provided will **help** you prepare a dinner in less **time**. In this case, Glasse is referring to a **Fast Dinner** as a meal, which is prepared without meat and can be used when one is fasting or abstaining. In her introduction to the chapter, she makes it clear that the dishes will be useful to those who may still fast during Lent (period of 40 days excluding Sundays from Ash Wednesday to Easter) or "for the convenience of those persons who may, by being near the sea **coast**, or in the **country** at a distance from market towns, find it easier to get fish and vegetables than meat whenever they want it..."

Altogether there are 223 recipes in chapter XVI and they cover a wide range of foods. It includes 19 soup recipes, 24 **fritter**/pancake recipes, 43 vegetable dishes, 15 egg dishes, 66 pudding recipes and 23 pie recipes. This variety of foods reflects the traditional British Shrovetide and Lenten observances. The Saturday before Lent was referred to as Egg Saturday. Pancakes were served on Shrove Tuesday. Ash Wednesday (the beginning of Lent) was Fritter Wednesday and Palm Sunday (last Sunday in Lent) was known as pudding pie Sunday. Glasse covers all of the recipes necessary to keep all of these observances, and "a number of good dishes which may be made use of at any other time."

For a cook today, this chapter can be used by anyone cutting back on their meat consumption but not necessarily their caloric intake. The last **recipe** in the chapter is "to roast a Pound of Butter". This dish is sewed on a bed of stewed oysters, and is a very rich recipe.

**Stewed Pears** is a **favourite** because it is so simple to make and yet so elegant to serve. These pears are a beautiful deep pink and have a sweet rich flavour. This recipe has been made many times at Historic Fort York and most recently at the Friends of Fort York annual fundraising Georgian **Dinner**. It was an impressive and delicious eye-catching dessert.

### Original Recipe:

*"Pare six large winter pears and either quarter them or do them whole: they make a pretty dish with one whole, the rest cut in quarters, and the cores taken out; lay them in a deep earthen pot, with a few cloves, a piece of lemon-peel, a gill of red wine, and a quarter of a pound of fine sugar; if the pears are very large, they will take half a pound of sugar, and half a pint of red wine; cover them close with brown paper, and bake them till they are enough. Serve them hot or cold (just as you like them), and they will be very good with water in the place of wine."*

### Modern Version:

6	pears ( <b>Bartlett</b> )	6
3-4 cloves	whole cloves	3-4
113 – 112	of peel from a lemon	113 – 112
125 ml	red wine	1/2 cup
125 ml	white sugar	1/2 cup

Wash and peel pears. Core and quarter five of the pears leaving the sixth whole. Lay them in a ceramic dish (22x22 cm / 9 x 9"). Add cloves, lemon peel and sugar to red wine. Stir mixture until sugar is completely dissolved. Pour over pears. Cover with foil and bake at 180 °C/350 °F for 40 – 45 minutes or until pears are just tender. (For even flavour and colour after baking about 20 minutes, remove dish from oven and baste pears with sauce. Return dish to oven and finish baking.) To serve pears use a pretty dish and set whole pear in the centre and lay quarters around it just slightly overlapping. Spoon remaining sauce over top or serve on the side.



## COOK NOTES: *By Joyce Lewis*



Ed Lyons, Volunteer Cook at **Spadina**, has asked where and when did the use of Rose Water as flavouring begin? I associate it with Victorian cooking, but apparently its use began in Arabia by the 13th century and may have been carried by Mongols into India. The *Shorter Oxford* dates the word to Late Mediaeval times, so perhaps Crusaders brought a taste for it to England. It can be distilled from *r. damascena*, which grows in the Balkans, Provence and Turkey, particularly around **Egridir**, a famous centre for Attar of Roses and Rose Water. Can anyone add to this?

Contact Joyce Lewis: [pjandjoyce@sympatico.ca](mailto:pjandjoyce@sympatico.ca)



## FIONA'S MUSINGS: WE NEED TO RESEARCH ABOUT.

We culinary historians in Ontario have a lot of work to do. Work as in research that needs to be accomplished. Not work as in, gosh, we're busy! Well, we are, but we're not sharing our work by publishing it.

Here are a few topics selected from my "to be researched" file. These topics need to be investigated by people interested in the history of Ontario's foodways, servants, kitchens and dining rooms. ■ offer this list in the spirit of scholarly comradeship, hoping some ideas will inspire you - for an article in a future newsletter of CHO, an article for a local newspaper or national magazine, an MA or PhD thesis, a class project. Or, dare I say it, a book! Well written overviews with extensive primary bibliographies are badly needed as fundamental secondary resources to support all the personal research happening at museum sites, in high school and university classrooms, and in the media, including the Canadian Food Network. The individual topics could be broadly focused on the whole of Canada, or better yet, on smaller areas like individual provinces, towns or cities.

One huge gap in our ability to research Canadian cookery will soon be filled by Elizabeth Drivers' *Culinary Landmarks: A Bibliography of Canadian Cook Book, 1825-1949*. Others must rise to Liz's superb example!

### NATIONAL OVERVIEWS:

We need a really good:

- a Series of summaries of **foodways** in each province, one book per province, from the First Nations to the year 2000.
- Illustrated history of Canadian kitchens.
- Culinary time line for reference desks everywhere.
- Anthology of Canadian culinary quotes.
- Illustrated general history of servants.
- Register of unpublished handwritten manuscript recipe books in archives, libraries and personal collections.
- Decade by decade study of 19th century Canadian foods, cook books and kitchens in the excellent style of A *Century of Canadian Home Cooking, 1900 to 1990s*, by Carol Ferguson and Marg Fraser (1992).
- Bibliography of primary and secondary articles and books other than cook books.
- Biographies of important Canadian culinary women, such as: home economist Nellie Lyle **Pattison** (*Canadian Cook Book, 1923*), home economist Kate Aitken (prolific cook book author and radio commentator), and Madame **Benoit** (another prolific cook book author and microwave promoter).

### INDIVIDUAL TOPICS FROM A PROVINCIAL OR NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE:

- Influence of the \_\_\_\_\_ on cookery in geographical area. Fill in the blank: **e.g.** Americans, British, Dutch, East
- Indians, Italians, Jamaicans, Mennonites, Russians, **Swedes**, Trinidadians ....

- History of \_\_\_\_\_ in (Canadian) cookery. Fill in the blank: **e.g.** shortening, pearlash, vanilla, pork, **curry**, mesclun greens, organics ... .
- History of \_\_\_\_\_ in geographical area. Fill in the blank: **e.g.** domestic science, cooking schools, ice industry, ice houses and cellars, root houses, war rationing ... .
- Reversal of value and attitudes to \_\_\_\_\_. Fill in the blank: oysters, eggs, chicken, Italian foods ... .
- Development of the 20th-century urban kitchen and dining room.
- Institutional kitchens: hospitals, jails, schools.
- Picnics, eating outdoors, dining **al fresco**.
- Culinary treatment for the **ill**.
- First Nations as consumers of European foodways in the 18th century middle-ground.
- Military cookhouses in British North America.
- Evolution of **Franco-Ontarien** foodways.
- Just how did the Loyalists feed themselves, really?
- Material culture studies of: food wraps (aluminum foil, wax paper etc.), the kitchen table, the peanut butter sandwich, baking powder, maple syrup, specific cook books, soap, the microwave oven, the chef's knife, the kitchenware shop ... .
- Revolutions in cookery: chemical leavening agents, bleached white flour, shortening, cheap white sugar, pudding cloths, iron cook stoves, vanilla, chocolate, Teflon cookware... .

Last issue, I invited responses to my experiences of food as the genesis for **personal** transformation. Unhappily, I never received any **feedback** - but I bet I inspired some reminiscing! Ever optimistic, I **once** again invite responses from CHO's readers: send me the topics-we-need-to-research that you are willing to share and I'll include them in my summer column.

FIONA LUCAS, Co-founder, CHO [lucasf@sympatico.ca](mailto:lucasf@sympatico.ca)

# Canadian Culinary History News

by Jo Marie Powers

**Culinary Historians of Ontario is pleased to announce that we are embarking on a partnership with Food History News. We will be sponsoring an article in each FHN issue, which will then be reprinted in CHO. This is our first, which will appear in FHN 52, spring 2002. Our thanks to Jo Marie for inaugurating this new venture!**

The big news in Canadian historical circles is that Dorothy Duncan stepped down as Executive Director of the Ontario Historical Society (OHS). During her long tenure Dorothy fostered culinary history, organized four conferences about Ontario's food history, and gave numerous workshops and talks, as well as publishing books on the topic. Fittingly, the OHS Board of Directors honoured Dorothy Duncan at an historic feast, a re-creation of the "Rendezvous" feast at Fort William, based on a paper written by Dorothy for the Oxford Symposium of Food and Drink in 1990.

Dorothy Duncan was quickly tapped as Chair of Cuisine Canada's next conference in Guelph, Ontario - Northern Bounty V, 4-6 October 2002. Cuisine Canada's conferences are an extravaganza to satisfy both mind and appetite. There will be more than 60 speakers, including Canada's foremost food and beverage writers. Three sessions on Canada's food history are being put together by well-known Canadian culinary historians including Fiona Lucas and Elizabeth Driver. As a bonus you can explore Canada's richest cookbook collection located in the University of Guelph's archives. The exchange rate is certainly favourable for Americans - get together a group, come up and find out what Canadian cuisine is all about. Guelph is just 50 miles from the Toronto airport. The web site for information and registration is [www.cuisinecanada.ca](http://www.cuisinecanada.ca).



Canadian food historians claim that "L'Ordre de bon temps," founded by Samuel Champlain in 1605, was the first gastronomic society in North America. Taking place before the founding of Plymouth, the Order was celebrated by a series of feasts. It had been noted that the explorers who did not become sick tended to be cheerful - so the answer was to have a good time

eating, drinking, and entertaining each other. "Ideas", a CBC (Canadian equivalent of NPR) radio program, with host Paul Kennedy, did an hour-long show about the Order. Members of Cuisine Canada gave a feast, bringing foods that could have been served at the feasts, and played the parts of the gentlemen and Mi'kmaq who attended. For menus, pictures and recipes from this feast see [www.radio.cbc.ca/programs/ideas/cheer/index.html](http://www.radio.cbc.ca/programs/ideas/cheer/index.html).

The oldest English-language Canadian cookbook written by a Canadian is the 1840 *Frugal Housewife's Manual*. Five authors are working on a reproduction of this book (Fiona Lucas, Christine Ritsma, Bob Wildfong, Mary Williamson and, Bridget Wronich). Part of their detective work is to seek out the identity of the author, known only as "A.B. of Grimsby." Mary Williamson's job involves finding out what she can about "A.B.", as well as the historical context and conditions under which the book was published. Mary says there is a strong American component in this book since much of Ontario was settled by British Loyalists from the U.S., along with Americans who saw financial opportunities or were given farmland in Ontario. A fascinating part of the book is the second half, containing directions for planting and maintaining garden vegetables. Most old cookbooks have a scarcity of vegetable recipes, perhaps because vegetables were considered simple to prepare and thus unworthy of recipes. Christine Ritsma and Bob Wildfong have spent their recent summers growing the many vegetables listed in the book, using heritage seeds (Bob Wildfong is President of Seeds of Diversity). When published, this reproduction will be accompanied by research papers, a glossary, recipes for modern kitchens, and ideas for the modern gardener.

In Quebec there is a food writer many Americans will be interested in knowing about, Micheline Mongrain Dontigny. Micheline interviews elderly women throughout the province about their early memories of cookery while collecting their recipes. The book she is working on presently is *Traditional Eastern Townships Cooking* and she talked with more than 200 persons throughout the townships, visited museums and consulted many small village cookbooks for her research. The Eastern Townships border New York State and were settled by both English and French people. Since Micheline is fluent in both languages, this book will be printed in both English and French. She has also published cookbooks about the traditional foods of the Charlevoix and Mauricie regions in Quebec. Still in print is her *Traditional Quebec Cooking: A Treasure of Heirloom Recipes*. You can order her books directly by contacting: Micheline Mongrain-Dontigny, Les Editions La Bonne Recette, 1055 rue Payette apt.206, St-Jean-sur-Richelieu, QC, J3A 1T8; email: [edition.bonnerecette@sympatico.ca](mailto:edition.bonnerecette@sympatico.ca).

■ Anyone has a passion for publishing old Canadian cookbooks it's Robert McCullough, Oirector of Publishing for Whitecap books in Vancouver. Whitecap's "Canadian Classic Cookbook Series" began with the first cookbook commercially available in Canada and is working its way through the years. To offer readers more than a simple reprint, Whitecap hired noted Canadian culinary historian, Elizabeth Driver, to direct, find appropriate copies of the original books, and write historical notes to be incorporated into the new editions. Titles in the series thus far are: ***The Five Roses Cook Book*** (1915), ***The Purity Cookbook*** (1967). The ***Laura Secord Canadian Cook Book*** (1966), ***The Supper Book*** written by Marion Cunningham (Fanny Farmer), and, just off the press, ***The Home Cook Book*** (1878). The latter celebrates its 125th anniversary this year and was the first fund-raising cookbook in Canada with proceeds used to begin Sick Children's Hospital in Toronto. Having crossed the border, many of these books were favourites in American kitchens. The series is available from Amazon.com or from local booksellers, and the books are distributed in the U.S. by Graphic Arts Center Publishing Company in Oregon.

Talking about Elizabeth Driver, she is going into the last stages of writing her bibliography of Canadian cookbooks entitled ***Culinary Landmarks: A Bibliography of Canadian Cookbooks, 1825-1949***. Liz describes every cookbook that was ever published in Canada before 1950 including extensive annotations, the location of each book, and all kinds of amazing discoveries that she found. For example, the earliest French-language cookbook written by a Canadian was ***La cuisinière canadienne*** which appeared to be lost. Liz's persistence led to the discovery of a copy in Quebec, which is now safely stored in Ottawa at the National Library, thanks to her efforts. Not surprisingly, with all of her adventures, she has been working on this major project for more than ten years.



Researcher Mary Williamson is looking for ***The British Lady's Diary, and Pocket Almanack for 1790***, advertised by ***The Quebec Herald*** (Quebec City), as published by the Herald on 15 December 1789. She is working on the ***History of the Book in Canada*** project, and is

researching household and cookery books up until 1841 (Elizabeth Driver is working on 1841 to 1918). She is also looking for information about Susannah Carter, author of ***The Frugal Housewife***, who, according to London editions, came from Clerkenwell, in the centre of the old town of London. If any of you can help in this search it would be much appreciated.

The Volunteer Historic Cooking Group is a highly successfully program initiated by Fiona Lucas, Senior Interpreter, Museums of the City of Toronto. Based in Toronto, these volunteer historic cooks, rigorously trained by Fiona, present food demonstrations, conduct cooking classes in museums and cook historic foods for special events. After six years, she now has 29 volunteers who, as costumed interpreters, enjoy interacting with the public and have been able to put their interest in early cooking to good use.

Amy Proulx, a graduate student at the University of Guelph, helped an organization search for an ingredient in old cookbooks - no one had come up with a single entry after searching for weeks. In an hour Amy found it in more than 20 cookbooks published before 1900. She used a marvelous internet resource: Early **Canadiana Online (ECO)**, [www.canadiana.org](http://www.canadiana.org). This web site will allow you to scan more than a million historical pages for precise keywords. The "page-turners" were somewhat **embarrassed!**

Finally, if you are looking for an exotic vacation and one that provides lots of culinary history, go to Newfoundland. There are Irish, English and French villages there where little has changed over centuries - for example, people still speak Old English in places like Twillingate. There is also a National Historic Site at L'Anse aux Meadows containing building remnants left by Norsemen nearly 1000 years ago. Interpreters at this site, actors cast in roles of the Vikings, allow you to experience 11th century food preparation using recreated cooking gear. Because of weather, June through August is probably the best time to visit. For more information search for "Newfoundland tourism" on the web or go to [www.parksCanada](http://www.parksCanada) for links to L'Anse aux Meadows.

**Jo Mane Powers, co-author with Anita Stewart of Northern Bounty: A Celebration of Canadian Cuisine, has a major interest in culinary history. She initiated Cuisine Canada's National Culinary Book Awards and is helping to build the cookbook collection at the University of Guelph. She retired several years ago from the School of Hotel and Food Administration, University of Guelph.**

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## *Great Food for Happy Kids* by Jesse Frayne

Book review by Thelma Barer-Stein,



Culinary historians may think this book isn't important for them. But look at it this way: what mom do you know who couldn't use some **fresh** and healthy ideas for feeding kids in a way that makes those eyes shine and smiles widen? And oh yes, garners some help for mom in the kitchen?

OK, here's the little book to do it. New member, Jesse Frayne, is the author of *Great Food for Happy Kids*, published by Renedezvous Press (Toronto). There's no question that even the cover of the book will delight you, but wait till you read Marni Jackson's foreword. Being a neighbour of author Jesse, her words have special significance because she really knows about Jesse and her cooking magic with kids and Marni notes that she has been "yearning for a sensible, sensual, kid-centric cookbook like this one."

The testimony to its practicality, kid-proof recipes and fun cooking will be the dribbled, splotted and stained book that everyone in your family wants to cook **from**. Featuring everything from finger food for tots to party, picnic meals, school lunches and tantalizing teen specialties like spring rolls, homemade pizza, breads, bagna cauda and more – there's something there for everyone. You'll be heading for the kitchen, Jesse's book in hand and a gleam in your eye...

A confession: I found myself delighted the way she introduces the more unusual vegetables, and even the smelly cheeses and warming soups so irresistibly that toddlers and teens and even **fussy** dads will be digging in. Not only that, they'll want to cook too. Jesse's writing and recipes have that effect.

Whew! Better buy a few copies for gifts so your copy won't "disappear". And quick get one for yourself, leave it on the kitchen table and go off and study Culinary History quietly by yourself. See what I mean?

*Great Food for Happy Kids* by Jesse Frayne; illustrations by Gina **Calleja**. – Toronto : Renedezvous Press, 2001. \$24.95



## *Sacred Food* by Elisabeth Luard

Book Review by Christine Ritsma

*Sacred Food* by Elisabeth Luard is both a visual and sensual exploration of the vital role which food has in religious ceremonies and secular celebrations around the world. Luard takes the reader on her journey to discover how food is traditionally served at important moments in our lives. The book is divided into four sections: fertility, cultivation and harvest; birth, baptism and initiation; courtship, betrothal, and marriage; and the last chapter talks about death, remembrance and resurrection. Luard reveals the historical background to many religious and cultural festivals where food is the predominant focus. Recipes such as Firmi (Afghan betrothal custard) are included to complement the readings as well as **beautiful** illustrations of foods and festivals from around the world.

I must admit I have been inspired by this book to take good stock of how I celebrate important or pivotal moments in my life and of my children's lives. In the past I know I purchased "things" to mark important personal milestones. This year when I organize a "Harvest Moon" Festival in October (celebration of the transition of summer to autumn), I think I will ask people to come early so we can spend time together preparing and cooking the foods for the night. Perhaps we will also set aside some to honour the Moon Goddess as well.

*Sacred Food: Cooking for Spiritual Nourishment* Elisabeth Luard, Chicago Review Press, 2001. \$53.00 **Cdn.&** well worth it!

### Other new publications worth noting:

- ❖ *The Laura Secord Canadian Cook Book*, reprint of the 1966 Canadian Classic. Whitecap Books. \$16.95. ISBN-1-55285-260-1
- ❖ *The Home Cook Book*, reprint of the 1877 edition with introduction by Elizabeth Driver. Whitecap Books. \$18.95. ISBN-1-55285-348-9
- ❖ *The Culinary Saga of New Iceland Recipes from the Shores of Lake Winnipeg*. Kristin Olafson-Jenkyns. Coastline Publishing. \$32.95. ISBN-0-9689119-0-0

