

Culinary Historians of Ontario

Summer 1997

Number 14 13



The Culinary Historians of Ontario is an information network for foodways research in Ontario. It is an organization for anyone interested in Ontario's historic foods and beverages, from those of the First Nations to recent immigrants. We research, interpret, preserve and celebrate Ontario's culinary heritage.

Tastes of the Season

During the spring, the visits to my local grocery store were very disappointing. Either my tastebuds had been frostbitten by the winter, or the fruits and vegetables offered in the produce section looked a little woody and wilted. Perhaps I anticipated that as I walked down the different aisles, some vegetable or fruit would jump out and say "Take me!"



This anticipation has a lot to do with wanting to enjoy the fruits of the season. What makes the summers so enjoyable (besides the weather) is the variety of locally grown foods that

can be purchased. In particular, the taste of asparagus in May, strawberries in June, corn and tomatoes in August, are unsurpassed.

Indeed, it often seems so confusing to see beans and corn offered when they are not "in season". Though I may be tempted to purchase these items, past experiences have suggested that they are not particularly satisfying. Karen Hess remarks in, *Taste of America*, that the tastes of the season is gone; it has been replaced by carrying quality." (p.39.) Regrettably our consumer society has demanded that *these tastes*

be made available year round, even though the quality has been drastically compromised.

And yet I wonder what our grocery stores would look like if only "in season" produce were made available. How would the public react? Perhaps consumers would resort to desperate, black market measures in order to protect their right to purchase the same tasteless, rubbery tomatoes to which they have grown accustomed to accepting.

Is it not worth the wait?

Christine Lupton, Culinary Historians of Ontario

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COOKERY COLLECTION

Summer Strawberry Season

Strawberry cream, strawberry sponge, strawberry fool, strawberry charlotte, strawberry ice cream, strawberry sundae, strawberry wine, strawberry pie, strawberry omelet, strawberry bombe, strawberries and cream, strawberries en fondant, strawberry sugar

Wild strawberries grew throughout Europe, South America and eastern North America. From pre-contact times and continuing today, the Six Nations have celebrated the agricultural year with a series of ceremonies. A Strawberry Festival is held in June to honour the first fruits.

European settlers in Ontario recognized the wild strawberry and transplanted them to their garden plots. As usual, Catherine Parr Traill has something useful to say: "I am anxiously looking forward to the spring, that I may get a garden laid out in front of the house; as I mean to cultivate some of the native fruit and flowers, which, I am sure, will improve greatly with culture. The strawberries that grow wild in our pastures, woods and clearings, are several varieties and bear abundantly. They make excellent preserves, and I mean to introduce beds of them into my garden." (*Backwoods of Canada*, letter IX, April 18 1833)

Anne Langton wrote on July 5 1839, "My mother and aunt preserved a quart of strawberries." How were they preserved? It could've been

plain jam, or a more interesting method, such as this one:

Strawberry Preserve



"Take three pounds large fair strawberries; free from stems and hulls, four pounds sugar, one pound raisins, place these in an earthen pot, first a sprinkling of sugar, then a laying of strawberries, another of raisins, and so alternately till the whole are placed in the pot, set it away in a cool place; if the weather should be warm, frequently sprinkle sugar upon them, by which they will be preserved fresh and good."

Cook Not Mad, no. 193, Kingston, Ontario, 1831

Strawberries herald the arrival of summer warmth and for many North Americans since the last quarter of the 19th century, strawberry shortcake means early summer festivities. The earliest known mention is 1841: "After church we came in time for another strawberry repast and a rich one it was. We had a new dish, 'Strawberry Short Cake', very fine indeed." (*Food History News*, spring 1995)

Strawberry Tartlets

"Take a full half-pint of freshly-gathered strawberries, without the stalks; first crush, and then mix them with two ounces and a half of powdered sugar; stir to them by degrees four well-whisked eggs, beat the mixture a little, and put it into pattypans lined with fine paste: they should be only three parts filled. Bake the tartlets from ten to twelve minutes."

Eliza Acton,
Modern Cookery for Private Families,
London, 1845



According to Jennifer Davies in *The Victorian Kitchen* (BBC, 1989, p 117), over 100 varieties were available in Britain in the 2nd half of the 19th century, but only 'Royal Sovereign', survived into the 1980s. How many were grown in Ontario? I wondered. In

1906, the Ontario Department of Agriculture published *Fruits of Ontario*, in which 16 commercial and domestic varieties are listed as suitable to our soil and weather conditions. Other kinds were probably grown in hot houses, however. The local strawberry industry was thriving by the 1880s, particularly in Oakville and Burlington. A 1980s hybrid from the Simcoe Research Station is named 'Governor Simcoe' after Ontario's first lieutenant-governor.

Strawberries are weather dependant; witness the very late arrival of homegrown strawberries this year due to the cold and very slow onset of spring. California strawberries will do, but Ontario's own are truly special.

... *strawberry delight, strawberry toffee, strawberry buns, strawberry jam, strawberry meringue, strawberry semolina, strawberry frosting, strawberry shortcake, strawberries dipped*

in chocolate, canned strawberries, strawberry cup cake strawberry waffles, strawberry pudding, strawberry jelly

Or warm ripe juicy strawberries plucked off a plant and popped directly into your watering mouth!!

Written by Fiona Lucas with assistance from the Ontario Agricultural Museum in Milton.

Cool Thoughts



It's one of the most refreshing ingredients to come out of your kitchen. Throughout history people were willing to climb mountains and cross oceans for it. Special structures were built to store and protect it. People often paid large sums of money to secure supplies of it. Fortunes were made and lost in the transportation and commerce of this product.

Today it's so easy to go to your kitchen, open your freezer and pull out ice. But over a century ago things were quite different.

In Canada our cold climate allowed for a harvest of ice used to cool food and drink during the summer months. The ice was cut in large blocks from ponds and lakes, packed in sawdust/straw and stored in houses built down into the ground where it would be cool. These ice houses were stoutly constructed of stone, brick, or wood and were sometimes thatched with pine branches for better insulation.

Naturally, there would be some shrinkage and melting as the temperatures increased. Under ideal conditions a supply of ice could last for the summer, but this was not always the case. John Howard, an architect, the owner of Colborne Lodge and founder of High Park in Toronto, states in his diary on August 28, 1839, "Evening with James clearing the Straw out of the ice House as all the ice had melted."

Fortunately for Mr. Howard, an ice company would eventually be established on nearby Grenadier Pond and he could order his ice rather than having to cut and store it himself. The Grenadier Ice Company was established in 1880 and it harvested 2,000 tons of ice that year. In 1886, the company had expanded its operations and was harvesting 9,500 tons of ice. Some of this ice must have traveled far because 1,000 tons were sold to the Grand Trunk and Canadian Pacific Railways.

As transportation and refrigeration technology developed, especially after the invention of a commercial ice making machine in 1858 by James Harrison in London, ice slowly became an everyday ingredient used in the kitchen, rather than a luxury.

Containers for Home Preserving

"Economical people will seldom use preserves, except for sickness. They are unhealthy, expensive, and useless to those who are well."

Lydia Maria Child
The American Frugal Housewife, 1833

I don't know whether Mrs. Child ever visited Upper Canada, but if she did, she probably thought little of either the health or frugality – or both – of her Canadian contemporaries. Pickles and preserves were a constant on Upper Canadian tables:

"The Canadians call potatoes, vegetables, pickles, and preserves, by the indiscriminate appellation of *sace*, and think themselves badly off if they have not *sace* in all its varieties, at every meal."

Rev. Thomas Radcliffe
Authentic Letters from Upper Canada, 1833

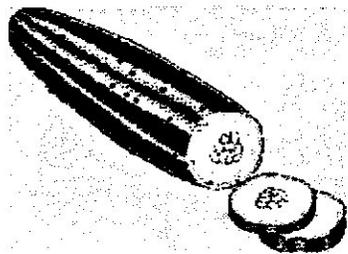
"Pickling has also been the order of the day. We consume more in the way of ketchups, sauces, curry-powder, etc., than we used to do at home [in England], on account of the many months we are without fresh meat."

Anna Langton

A Gentlewoman in Upper Canada
3 August 1839

"In Canada, preserves are always placed on the table at the evening meal, and often in the form of tarts."

Catherine Parr Traill
The Canadian Settler's Guide, 1854



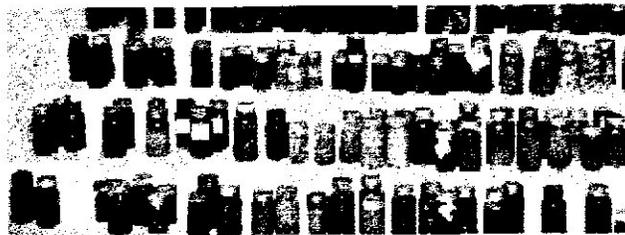
While bottled foods, including pickles and jams were available commercially from both British and American sources early in the 19th

century, the country housewife with a garden would have found it much more economical to make than to buy them. The stores of pickles and preserves in the Upper Canadian cellar or larder, however, were

not the rows of Mason jars we associate with preserving foods at home today. They weren't invented until 1858. Until then, various containers and methods of sterilizing and sealing the containers were used. In the early 19th century, Nicholas Appert, seeking a method of preserving foods for the use of Napoleon's army, first developed the technique of sterilizing cooked foods and containers together by boiling, as used in this 1831 recipe To preserve Gooseberries, Damsons or Plums:

"Gather them when dry, full grown, and not ripe; pick them one by one, put them into glass bottles, that are very clean and dry, and cork them close with new corks; then put a kettle of water on the fire, and put in the bottles with care; wet not the corks; but let the water come up to the necks; make a gentle fire till they are a little coddled and turn white; do not take them up till cold, then pitch the corks all over, or wax them close and thick; then set them in a cool dry cellar."

The Cook Not Mad, no. 187
Kingston, UC, 1831

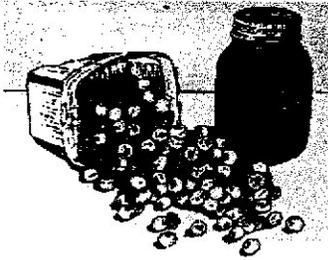


A slightly different bottling technique is advised in this recipe, How to keep peas green till Christmas:

"Take young peas, shell and put them in a cullender to drain, then lay a cloth four or five times double on a table, and spread them on, dry them very well, and have your bottles ready, fill them, cover over with mutton suet fat when it is a little soft; fill the necks almost to the top, cork up, tie a bladder and leather over them and set away in a dry cool place."

The Cook Not Mad, no. 44
Kingston, UC, 1831

Pickling was a surer and more popular way of preserving vegetables. Pickles were made in casks of large crocks, often in large amounts. Raw or cooked vegetables were packed into a crock, sometimes sprinkled with salt and drained after several hours or days to remove moisture, and then covered with boiling vinegar. The vinegar could be improved by spices such as "mace, bruised ginger, whole pepper, and cloves," or other additives, such as grape leaves, used to add colour to pickled cucumber. Variations for those who couldn't obtain vinegar included pickling in brine or a mixture of water and whiskey, which Catherine Parr Traill promised turned into vinegar. [Has anyone tried this? Does it indeed turn into vinegar?]



Fruits, whole in sugar syrups or crushed and cooked down to jams and jellies, could be stored in large stone/earthenware pots or smaller glass jars. Mrs. Child advises

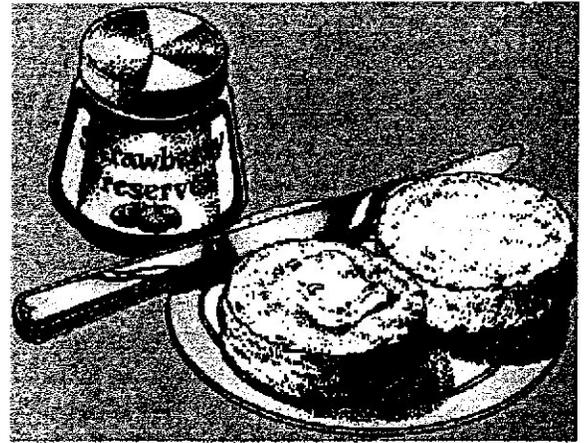
that "glass is much better than earthen for preserves; they are not half so apt to ferment." Whatever the container, the chief problem was in sealing the top. Unlike salt and vinegar, sugar is not a preservative; the acidity of fruits aids in their preservation, but in order to last, sweet preserves need to be completely sealed from the air and airborne contaminants. A lid of paper, wet first with brandy and tied on with string, was one option. Properly prepared, these paper lids would tighten as they dried. Catherine Parr Traill gave instructions for a more elaborate double paper lid:

"Cut paper dipped in spirits, and lay on the top, the size of the inner rim of the jar: have a larger round cut, so as to cover the outer rim; beat up the white of an egg, and with a feather brush this paper over; press the edges close to the jar: to do this well, snip the edge with the scissors, which will make it form to the shape of the jar.

"Preserves thus secured from the air, do not mould as in the ordinary mode of tying them up, and the trouble is not more than tying with string."

Catherine Parr Traill

The Canadian Settler's Guide, 1854



A British source gives alternatives:

"Nothing ... can more thoroughly exclude the air than bladder over corks, or a double bladder. ... Good corks dipped in resin are effectual; ... melted suet in a thick layer is sometimes poured upon the paper."

The Dictionary of Wants, 1858

It wasn't until 1858 that John L. Mason invented the rubber-sealed vacuum jar, designed for air-tight, long-term storage, that we still generically refer to by his name. When the Mason jar and other similar jars produced by competing companies, such as Dominion and Bell, became commonly available in Ontario is not clear, but by 1897 Sears Roebuck was selling "Mason's Fruit Jars" in pint, quart and half gallon sizes. In 1908, Montreal's Henry Morgan & Co. sold "Self Sealing Preserve Jars, in earthenware. Contents not affected by light, as in glass." Not everyone switched to the new equipment; in 1897, Sears Roebuck also offered half-pint and one-third-pint "Jelly Tumblers" with what appear to be screw-on, rubberless tin lids. Pickle crocks are still available in hardware stores today.

Into the 20th century, as in Appert's day, new commercial technologies affected home preserving. When historic recreation is made of the 1950s kitchen, the pantry will likely contain rows of jams and jellies stored in reused baby food jars, sealed with layers of paraffin.

Submitted by Manda Vranic, Master of Museum Studies, University of Toronto, presently at Metro Archives

Researching Food History:

Some Advice and Some Practice

On Saturday May 31, about 35 people gathered in a little church at Pickering Museum Village for a day on 19th Century Food Traditions with Dorothy Duncan, Executive Director of the Ontario Historical Society (see Culinary Colleague, CHO #9). "19th Century Food Traditions" is far too large a subject to satisfactorily cover in one workshop. But food history requires a knowledge of the period's culture and there was a wide range of experience among the participants

Still, each of us left with new ideas and information. I found Dorothy's list of research questions helpful. With so few secondary sources on Ontario foodways, even considering researching food can be daunting. I always wonder, "Where shall I start?" She gave us some tips:

1. Who are you researching? You must know the background of the people about whose food traditions you want to know.
2. What period are you really researching? The 1850s in Toronto were very different than the 1850s in Amaranth Township.
3. Why are you researching? This dictates which details are important to you and how many details you need to find.
4. How soon do you need it? Dorothy says it takes twice as long as you think it will (something I find easy to forget and good to remember).
5. Where should I start? Look up specific foods in a dictionary; then trace it back through older dictionaries. Check encyclopedias and all secondary sources you can find. See if someone is available to interview. Work with primary sources (original cook books, letters, newspapers, seed catalogues, trade cards, hand written recipe books, archaeological reports).

Dorothy also pointed out something that I hadn't considered before: the public's concerns are very influential to culinary history. For example, today's consumers are more health conscience as they look to reduce the levels of fat in their diet. On the other hand, late nineteenth cook books witness an increase in the amount of sugar and chemical leaveners in

recipes. The taste for sweeter, puffier breads and cakes were gaining popularity.



During *Down in the Dairy* I enjoyed churning and washing butter, while others made ice cream (the recipe was from *The Italian Confectioner*, 1861), but I would've liked a longer discussion on the historical process of dairying.

After lunch, Dorothy talked about *Setting the Victorian Table* and Sweetmeat Baskets and Sweetmeats. We made baskets from *The Girl's Own Manual*. By the time we finished folding baskets and picking out ribbons and lace to decorate them, most hands were covered with homemade paste.

My favourite part of the day was the food (it's the food in food history that's most interesting, right?) We tasted our food: fresh butter, candied orange peel, marzipan stuffed dates, and "Nice cookies to keep good three months" from *The Cook Not Mad* (1831) (which tasted good - crisp and sugary, but I was disappointed they were made with baking soda instead of pearl ash). And wonderful vanilla ice cream. I can't wait to make my own historic ice cream at home!

Joanna Repka is a Volunteer Historic Cook with Heritage Toronto. She has just graduated from high school.

The Culinary Historians of Ontario will be participating at the ALFAM (Association of Living Historical Farms and Agricultural Museums) Canadian Regional Meeting on Sunday, September 28, at Dundurn Castle, Hamilton. We will be delivering two sessions -- the first, "And So Serve It Forth" and introduction to researching and interpreting cookbooks and receipts -- and second *From Then to Now* an illustrated overview of Ontario's culinary heritage. For more information, please contact Dundurn at (905) 546-2872.

We will be delivering two sessions and encourage you to join us.

Culinary Queries

Colleen Leo is our new Culinary Queries columnist. She has degrees in English, chemistry, pharmacology and education. "My interest in culinary history stems from childhood: stories which mentioned food came alive for me. And so, I roasted cheese with Heidi's grandfather, had scones and Devon cream with British storybook heroes, and ate rice cakes with young Chinese adventurers." Please send queries to her via Christine's address on the back page.

What is a bridie and how did the name originate?

"A hot sweet-smelling bridie, whose gravy oozed deliciously through a bursting paper bag."

Sir James Barrie *Sentimental Tommie* (1896)

Barrie was one of many Scots proud of this sublime meat turnover. Bridies are one of the few traditional Scottish recipes to use Angus Aberdeen beef, almost always exported by cash-poor farmers. The name *bridie* may originate from a 19th century Maggie Bridie who sold these pasties in Forfar, Scotland. However, according to folklore and Alex Grieve, *bridie* derives from *bride's pie*, a large meat pie which was prepared by a bride's friends, broken over the bride's head (yes, protected by a cloth), and then served as the wedding meal.

Bridies are usually made commercially. Some recipes include onions, carrots and/or potatoes; some use lamb instead of beef. Here's a recipe for Forfar Bridies by Mr. Jolly, a mid-19th century baker quoted in F. Marion McNeill's *The Scots Kitchen* (1929; 1974):

Steak, pepper, salt, onions (optional), flour, water

Take a pound of the best steak. Beat it with the paste roller, then cut it into narrow strips, and again cut them into inch lengths and season with salt and pepper. Divide into three portions. Mince finely three ounces of suet. Make a stiff dough with flour, water, and a seasoning of salt [nowadays, rough puff or short paste is commonly used] and roll out thin into three ovals. Cover the half of each oval with the meat; sprinkle with the suet and a little minced onion if desired; wet the edges, fold over, and crimp with finger and thumb; nip a small hole on top of each. Bake for about half an hour in a quick oven and they will come out golden-brown dappled beauties, fit for a king's supper. The bridies may be baked in a hot oven until the paste begins to colour, then at a reduced (moderate) temperature until the steak, is tender when tested with a skewer. They should be eaten hot.

Thanks to Alex Grieve of The Savoury (33 Erb St. W., Waterloo), Scottish Collection of University of Guelph, and Peg Nicolson, Waterloo.

Mainly Because of the Meat

The Joseph Schneider Haus Museum holds a Butchering Bee in the Mennonite tradition every November. This year on **Saturday, November 29, from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.**, the museum is offering a day long workshop for members of the Culinary Historians of Ontario. Participants will work with Pennsylvania-German butcher Harold Snider as he butchers a

pig. Following a delectably meaty lunch at the museum, Swiss-trained butcher Franz Kissling and his son Daniel, owners of Stratford Packers, will demonstrate and discuss the making of sausages in the European tradition.

In the afternoon, members will also have an opportunity to join costumed staff as they recreate

the activities involved in a mid-19th century butchering bee.

Mark this date on your calendar!!

Cost for the day, which includes lunch, is \$10.00 per person.

For more information, or to register, please phone Cathy Blackburn at Joseph Schneider Haus at (519) 742-7752.

Culinary Calendar

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

September

Use of Herbs in 19th Century Household

The Gibson House Museum (416) 395-7432

September 6 1:00 - 4:00 pm

September 9 10:00 - 1:00 pm

Discover the importance of herbs in the historic kitchen and garden. Cost \$20.00. Pre-registration required.

Seed Saving Workshop

Doon Heritage Crossroads (519) 748-1914

Homer Watson Blvd., Kitchener

September 13 10:00 - 12:00 pm

Learn the art and science of seed saving and see methods for controlling pollination, proper harvesting and storage of seeds demonstrated. Cost \$5.00

Herb Walk

Riversong Herbs & Naturals (519) 323-3252

September 14

Held at an 1853 farmhouse, includes a walk for wild herbs and edibles and lunch by chef Jenny Cambria. Cost \$ 70.00 includes light breakfast, workshop lunch, wine, and recipe booklet.

Herbal Remedies Workshop

Riversong Herbs & Naturals

R. R. # 2, Mount Forest

(519) 323-3252

September 21

Learn to recognize medicinal herbs during this three hour programme and make some simple preparations for use at home. Hosted by Monklands Bed and Breakfast, Fergus. Cost \$70.00 and includes afternoon tea by the river, materials, instruction booklet and herbal remedies. Reservations required.

Bread and Preserves

The Gibson House Museum (519) 395-7432

September 20 or 23 10:00 - 2:00 pm

Two favourite tastes of the harvest season. Cost \$20.00. Pre-registration required.

Apple Tasting Evening

Doon Heritage Crossroads (519) 748-1914

September 25 7:00 - 9:00 pm

Sample over 20 different varieties of apples favoured a century ago & still grown locally. Cost \$8.00.

Apple Days

The Gibson House Museum (519) 395-7432

September 27 & 28 12:00 - 5:00 pm

Delicious apple treats from the historic kitchen.

October

Harvest Festival

Heritage Toronto, Colborne Lodge (416) 392-6916

Colborne Lodge Drive, Toronto (South end of High Park)

Growers of organic produce, historic gardening experts, purveyors of preserves and a local beekeeper will all have their wares on display and for sale.

Herb Walk in New England

Riversong Herbs & Naturals (519) 323-3252

October 4 - 11

Itinerary includes Hyannis, Sandwich Village, Edgartown, and onto Mystic where at an Inn on Lake Waramoug there will be walks through the countryside to learn about indigenous herbs and cooking at Silo Cooking School as well as a visit to Caprilands Herb Farm. Registration required.

Fall Fair and Apple Harvest

plus Bake It With Apples Contest

Black Creek Pioneer Village (416) 736-1733

October 4 & 5 12:00 - 5:00 pm

The Fair is held at the heart of the apple season and visitors can enjoy a weekend of apple jam, apple butter, apple soup, and fresh apple cider. Please call the village to register for the Bake It With Apples Contest.

Pumpkins, Puddings & Pies

The Gibson House Museum (416) 395-7432

October 11 - 13 12:00 - 5:00 pm

Enjoy the fruits of the garden's bounty.

Culinary Credits

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Thanks for this issue to Manda Vranic, Colleen Leo, Joanna Repka & Charlene Wranich

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