The Greater Midwest Foodways Alliance sponsored an Heirloom Recipe competition at the 2009 Illinois State Fair. Contestants entered their best made from scratch heirloom recipe suitable for a family or community dinner. To encourage deep digging, they were asked for recipes from 1950 or earlier.

Participants brought a prepared dish along with its recipe and history. Ideally, this history included those who passed this recipe down to them. They were asked to offer ethnicity, if relevant, and other information such as how long the recipe has been in their family and any interesting information or stories related to the recipe.

The Greater Midwest Foodways judges had suggested submissions of entrees and side dishes. A broader range of food than expected was delivered: two breakfast breads, three soups, one sauce, two main courses, one side dish, and four desserts. The only sauce was a 100-year-old barbecue sauce delivered with meat braised in the sauce. The side dish was Polish potato dumplings called Kluski accompanied by round steak and gravy.

To avoid the headache of comparing unlike dishes, the judges used ideas from 4-H judging criteria. Like items were grouped together for evaluation, i.e. soups, to determine the best of each class. Later they compared the first place of each class, if any represented first class designation. This method helped divine first, second, third place and honorable mentions for any remaining first place of any class. Judging criteria was weighted at 50% for taste, 40% for history and 10% for appearance, which is useful in a tiebreak. The winners on this occasion evoked a strong Central European presence:

- First Prize: Polish potato dumplings served two purposes: eagerly anticipated by the family and stretched their food resources.

- Second Prize: Croatian Potica, a black walnut filled bread served warm until it oozes on Christmas morning.

- Third Prize: Fresh yeast raised donuts once made for her grandparents seed corn customers.

- Honorable Mention: Potato soup with rivel, a dumpling which may be of Pennsylvania-Dutch origin.

- Honorable Mention: Brown Sugar Cookies, which “is closer to a biscuit than a traditional cookie and uses common farmhouse ingredients.”

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President’s Message

Dear Friends,

This being the inaugural newsletter of the Greater Midwest Foodways Alliance, a little history of how the organization began is in order. Several of us in the Culinary Historians of Chicago and Chicago Foodways Roundtable had been contemplating all the good reasons to form a new organization. One devoted to the history and customs of food not of Chicago or internationally as these two have been, but specifically to the American Midwest. Catherine Lambrecht had attended meetings of the Southern Foodways Alliance and John T. Edge, one of its founders and long-time director, was an old friend of mine. Why not a group, like the SFA for the Midwest, we thought. We talked and talked from time to time until 2007 when Catherine decided that enough hot air was enough. John T. was in Chicago for a conference, so Catherine rounded me up and we met him to find out how the SFA had been formed. The result of that conversation and encouragement by our friend is the Greater Midwest Foodways Alliance. And, it is Midwestern in more ways than name alone.

While we consider ourselves northern cousins of the SFA, we have not followed slavishly their example. One example is cost. Filled with a Midwestern can-do spirit, the nascent GMFA has held two conferences even before fully organizing and incorporating as a non-profit entity: We haven’t even asked for memberships yet. “Encased Meats,” and “Sweets,” were successful in terms of attendance and in attracting considerable media attention. Unlike almost any other national conference, the cost to attendees is remarkably low. The lowest possible cost to attendees has been Culinary Historians of Chicago policy since it’s founding in 1993, and carries on into GMFA. One might say that this is Midwestern frugality, but it is also good old Midwestern democratic values—to be as open and accessible as possible to all people and ideas.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our board members. I also want to thank Mary Adolf, Eleanor Hanson, George Macht, and Kantha Shelke who have generously devoted their time and spirit to the creation of this organization.

Now that we are on the verge of creating a fully formed organization, with memberships, our third conference is at hand: “Beef: From Plains to Plate.” With notable speakers and an entertaining, highly educational program, this should be the biggest and best yet. And maybe best of all no one ever left a Greater Midwest Foodways Alliance hungry. You can’t get more Midwestern than that.

Bruce Kraig
Almond Cookery from Northern Europe to the Midwest

Or how an exotic import retained its status over time and tide

Synopsis of presentation by Ken Albala, Professor of History, University of the Pacific at the Greater Midwest Foodways Alliance Conference April 5th, 2008. Full text available at GMFA website.

Attendees at the GMFA held in April, 2008 were treated to a talk by Professor Ken Albala of the University of the Pacific. The author of many works on culinary history and several distinguished book series, Albala is one of the country’s leading culinary historians.

Titled “Almond Cookery from Northern Europe to the Midwest, or how an exotic import retained its status over time and tide,” this was a study of how a medieval European ingredient and ways of using it have been passed down a thousand years to modern Midwestern dishes. Not only was this an excellent example of how culinary historians work, it showed the how a hidden antiquity in many foodways and the power of tradition.

Albala began with this premise: “Midwesterners of Scandinavian descent have long relished the prospect of their medieval Viking forebears centuries ago treading the very same ground they now occupy. A kind of culinary archaeology does indeed show that the gastronomic preferences of modern Midwesterners, particularly the penchant for almond laden recipes and sweets, does have its roots in medieval Nordic cuisine. In other words, the various almond preparations, popular especially at Christmas time, can be traced in direct line of descent from the earliest European manuscript cookbooks transcribed in the 12th century into Danish, Low German and Icelandic.”

“This line of inquiry was first suggested to me by certain culinary rudiments in Scandinavian cookery which had long been abandoned in most European cuisines. The most glaring was the use of cardamom in cookies. How did an Indian spice retain a place in confections centuries after it had been all but forgotten elsewhere in Europe? No other exotic import retained its unique place in this cuisine from medieval to modern times more than the almond.”

The story begins with the Scandinavian diaspora from the 9th to 12th Centuries - the infamous Viking raids (still recalled by the football team of that name) and the resultant trade routes that developed from the Mediterranean and Middle East across Europe into Scandinavia. A 12th Century cookery book found in Denmark, translated from the Italian original, holds the earliest recipe for almonds found in north Europe: for almond oil. Almond milk, another recipe, became a staple of early European cooking, and 15th Century cookbooks have it mixed with sugar. These were not only desserts such as Blanmange, but for meat dishes, as well.


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Won’t you join us?

We invite anyone to the table who has an interest in Midwest food culture or who defines himself as Midwestern regardless of race, creed or arbitrary political borders. We encourage participation from all walks of life from academics to food enthusiasts, chefs to grill masters to home cooks, farmers to heirloom gardeners, food scientists, students and industry.

For membership and sponsorship information contact:

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-The important thing about a corn dog stick is that it shouldn’t be pointed on the end. In fact, a wooden coffee stirrer makes a nice corn dog stick. (Gus Paschalis of Wiener and Still Champion)

-Vienna Beef dogs get their texture from bull meat. In addition to texture, there’s also a lot of flavor in bull meat — it can’t really be eaten, though, unless it’s ground fine. (Bob Schwarz of Vienna Beef)

-A hamburger is technically a sausage. (Andrew F. Smith, Editor-in-Chief of *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Food and Drink*)

-The popularity of the hamburger was initially bolstered by health claims made by doctors, including one Dr. Salisbury. (Andrew F. Smith)

-Tom Tom Tamales are made with the original 1937 equipment, and packaged by hand. (Peter Engler)

-Mustard has no business on a tamale. (Peter Engler)

-Veal brats, spiced with parsley and lemon peel, are associated with Munich, whereas the Sheboygan-style brat, more coarsely ground and differently spiced, originated in Northern and Eastern Germany. (Ms. Trudy Knauss Paradis)

-Most (non-skinless) hot dogs today are encased in cellulose, made from wood pulp. (Robert E. Rust aka The God of Sausage)

-The most closely guarded secrets in sausage making are the spice mixtures. (Robert E. Rust)

-There are no schools devoted exclusively to sausage making in the U.S., but we do have a National Cured Meats Hall of Fame. (Randy Ream of Elburn Market)

-Thanks to the Frankomatic and the Wiener Tunnel, mass production of hotdogs has reached levels that permit artisanal sausage making to re-emerge in the U.S. (Bob Schwarz of Vienna Beef)

-The attitude of Flint, Michigan residents toward the Coney Dog can only be described as reverent. One Flint Coney restaurant features a glass wall etched with the images of God and Man from Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling. (William Lockwood)

-And perhaps the most surprising thing I learned: one should not disrespect liquid smoke products, as they are made with real smoke, in a process not unlike the one used to make vanilla. Additionally, they have the known carcinogens removed. The taste problem is with the commercially available products, which are poor versions of what can be a complex and flavorful product. These are custom-made for sausage companies. (Robert E. Rust aka The God of Sausage.)
Navy’s Culinary Specialist “A” School at Great Lakes

by Catherine Lambrecht

Every Thursday at Great Lakes Naval Station, 30 students graduate from Culinary Specialist “A” School. This “A” school is an intense 22-day course involving 11 days in the classroom, six days in the food lab and five days in the bake shop. Most students arrived never having boiled water or cooked an egg. They graduate having met 32 course objectives including food safety, scaling menus, baking bread, cooking an egg over easy and preparing a lasagna. They depart to cook at United States Naval bases, ships and submarines throughout the world.

Traditionally, a ship’s cook was a sailor whose injuries prevented his performance of duties. By default, he made a contribution by cooking, whether or not he had the skills. In today’s Navy, a cook’s service is not limited to the galley. They are also cross trained as first responders, medics, security and firefighters.

Depending on the mission, scale and risk, the budget per crew member is established. The daily budget per person on an aircraft carrier is $7.85 per day and a submarine is $11.00, according to the school’s instructors.

For an aircraft carrier with a population of 5,000 and several hundred cooks, the food service is on a massive production scale.

Submarines have a reputation for the better food, due to smaller crews of perhaps 130 people and 8 cooks. No more than a third of the crew is eating at any one time, because they are either on duty, asleep or dining. Serving only 40 people at any time allows a more personalized service with cooks being familiar with individual preferences or allergies. Since submarines will not resurface for months, food is stored in every possible place including crated boxes on the floor.

At the Navy’s Culinary School, their training kitchens replicate those available on ship. There are specialized cooking vessels for their cooking conditions: flat top grills and deep fryers set inside deep wells with lids to allow cooking in rough seas. Large kettles with lock-down lids keep the contents from sloshing. Long handles help chefs avoid leaning over the pot to pull down the lid.

Foods prepared in laboratory classes are eaten by the students. They have a demonstration officer’s dining table to practice table arrangements and service. Students proudly note it is Navy personnel who have been personal cooks to the president of the United States.

In December, 2010, all Department of Defense services will train their cooks at Fort Lee, Virginia where there will be combined classes for the food and baking laboratory classes. The Army and Marines will cook in field tents. The Navy will work in kitchens simulating conditions on a ship.

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Almonds continued from page 3

Albala points out the recipes are almost identical to the earlier cookbooks. Henriette Davidis’ Practical Cookbook published in Milwaukee in 1896 was a translation from a German original. One recipe, “Almond Milk for the Sick,” is virtually the same as the one in the 12th Century cookbooks and uses the same equipment for making it.

A 1916 community cookbook from Ohio shows the same continuity: “And they are basically unchanged, especially the flavorings. Consider the presence of pepper in a sweet cookie. Or the dense clusters of spice in the lebkuchen - cinnamon, cloves, allspice, plus citron and honey, mixed with eggs and crushed almonds.”

Other recipes submitted:
- Tomato soup tasting of stuffed peppers;
- Lithuanian Saltibarsciai Cold Beet Soup;
- Butterscotch Pie that may serve one to eight people;
- 1-2-3-4 Cake made for family birthdays;
- Rhubarb Roll Ups made for a city raised grandchild visiting her farmer grandparents;
- Grandma Cook’s Disappearing Baked Beans, a family favorite ever since it was served during the Depression to feed a large family.
- Czech Ptaki, meat rolled up and secured by toothpicks suggesting birds. Served with two sauces: original sour cream and Daddy’s favorite (cream) with lots of dill. The narrative inquired which sauce did the judges like best?

The State Journal Register of Springfield, Illinois featured the Heirloom Recipe competition. In advance of the histories and recipes added to the website, there were many requests for recipes submitted to their food editor and The Greater Midwest Foodways. This response is very encouraging for possibly expanding this competition to other Midwestern state fairs.

These recipes and stories are available at www.GreaterMidwestFoodways.com under the tab for Events, then follow the menu to the State Fair Photo Credit: Peter Engler

www.greatermidwestfoodways.com
Ingenuity in a Time of Need

by Rebecca Holmquist
(Reprinted with permission by Minnetrista)

It was 1934, the middle of the Great Depression. Times were hard for many people. Those who had jobs were grateful; those who didn’t were desperate. Families with no means of support had to rely upon the generosity of family, friends, churches and relief agencies for food and shelter. But demand was great and resources were limited.

Orphanages were doubly pressed by the hard times of the Depression. The ever-increasing number of mouths to feed was accompanied by steadily decreasing coffers, as contributions dwindled. Few had money to donate.

Such was the case at the Southern Methodist Orphans Home in Waco, Texas. The Home always had produced much of its own food while teaching the children skills. It had the space and facilities. There were dairy cows to milk, vegetables gardens to tend and chickens to feed.

But it was never quite enough. The Home always needed to buy more food. But now the sources of the money to do this were rapidly drying up in the depth of the Depression. And hungry children were showing up on the doorstep every day.

This put the superintendent of the Home, Hubert Johnson, in a quandary. The Depression showed no signs of ending soon, and no benefactor was in sight. Pleas to the local churches for money had been made, and made, and made, with ever decreasing results. None had money, and the children were still hungry. He needed a plan.

Johnson had an idea. While people didn’t have extra money, almost everyone had a garden in their backyard. Johnson used a gift of $1,500 from R. P. Willis of Atlanta, Texas to have the Ball Brothers Glass Company plant in Wichita Falls, Texas make 16,000 Ball fruit jars with a special embossing on the back.

When home gardens were ready for harvesting, jars were distributed to Methodist churches in the area. The women of the church were asked to:

“Take just one jar home with you, and put it with your other jars. When you are done with your canning, find the jar with the words ‘Property of Southern Methodist Orphans Home, Waco, Texas’ embossed on the back, and bring it back to the church.”

What went into the jar didn’t matter - green beans, corn, peaches - the orphanage could use anything. In this way, the people who donated the food would be sure that their gift would go directly to the orphans, and the orphanage had found a way to provide for their children in the middle of the Depression. Johnson called this the “Giving What You Have” plan. The plan worked successfully for many years.

We know of this story because the institution still exists today, now called Methodist Children’s Home. A recent administrator is quite familiar with the jars. Jack Kyle Daniels was an orphan in the Home, and washed many of the jars as part of his duties. One of them sits proudly on his desk.

However, few of the 16,000 jars have survived. Fortunately, one example of this specially-marked jar, a clear, square half-gallon, resides in the Minnetrista Heritage Collection today, serving as a reminder of the misery of the Great Depression and a unique way of overcoming it.
Upcoming Events

Beef: From Plains to Plate
Following the Cattlemen’s Trail to Savory Midwest Beef Traditions

October 23-25, 2009
Kendall College
Chicago, Illinois

For registration and sponsorship information contact:
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