

2009 Culinary Historians of Boston Banquet

By Isabel Chesak

Gray skies were no deterrent to the festive mood of members and friends at a banquet of 18th century colonial dishes prepared by the Culinary Historians of Boston. The event held at Newbury College on Sunday May 17 as part of a three-year adventure where the Culinary Historians will be cooking banquet foods inspired by the Triangle Trade. The Triangle Trade refers to Colonial era trade of the shipping of slaves, rum and sugar between the Caribbean, New England and England. The menu prepared for the banquet was one we would find in a New England coastal tavern between the years 1700 and 1775. This period, rich in new foodstuffs but under-explored by historians, is an area of comfortable hearty dishes and long-simmered favorites and is worthy of culinary research. Newbury College's Mitton House provided a classic and genteel environment for the event thanks to Madonna Berry, Assistant Professor of Culinary Arts at the college. The food and drink of the so-called "pumpkin heads" of the 18th century were the products of many changes in the kitchen. In order to replicate the recipes of that era, authentic culinary manuscripts were used.

One of the dishes prepared for the event was "thirded bread," the name *thirded* being derived from the fact that the bread consists of 1/3 rye, 1/3 Indian corn and 1/3 wheat. These thirded breads were prepared by Marian Walke, a bread maker par excellence, who explained the origin of the title. Cider jelly, warm and sweet (brought by Mark Zanger) was delicious with the breads as was a preparation of pounded cheese prepared by Meg Ragland. Since refrigeration in the 18th century was non-existent, cheeses would become hard and dry particularly during the winter months. They were therefore pounded with butter, liquor and spices until of a creamy and spreadable consistency. A second delicious bread product made by Anne Faulkner was wild blueberry and currant scones. While enjoying the breads we were also encouraged to try sundry libations such as hard New England cider, Bual Madeira, Rum grog, and Samuel Adams Boston Ale (the latter being the closest to the beer drunk by colonials of the 18th century). There was also French pear cider, beach plum chokecherry bounce, as well as green tea, herbal tea and coffee – most of which were contributed by Mark Zanger and Roz Cummins.

Moving on to the feast we sampled home-smoked ham from culinary historian and author Sandy Oliver's own belted pigs raised, butchered, and smoked by Sandy and her husband. The pork had been brined with sugar, water and salt before being smoked. It was divine, as were "Mussels Fregacy," a fricassee of mussels steamed with fresh herbs, onion and lots of butter. The mussels had been prepared by Barbara Salisbury and Jan Smith as was the heady grog of rum, sugar, lemons and limes. "Soup Meagre" was a vegan soup of sorrel, parsley, onions and carrots was also savory with its crispy bits of toasted bread for garnish. Agni Thurner had prepared this dish as well as a crunchy and decorative celery "sallet." In addition to this "sallet" were served several others, a fennel salad by (Meg Ragland) and a cooked spinach salad flavored with currants, cinnamon, ginger and cider vinegar; the latter being the contribution of Mary Faulkner. Succotash made with bits of smoked pork, corn, lima and kidney beans was the work of Judy Kales. It was smooth and flavorful. Anne Faulkner had also prepared a bean dish. In this case baked beans with

molasses, salt pork and onion. A deliciously crisp and buttery chicken (the work of Roz Cummins, including purchase from the live poultry store) was memorable while an enormous boiled dinner of fresh pork, parsnips, potatoes, carrots and beets was the successful preparation of Ruth Palombo. Shad baked with lemon, mustard powder and horseradish by Mark Zanger was a definite treat.

In spite of these savories we still had room for dessert. The exquisite mincemeat tarts made with beef, claret and rosewater were the work of Barbara Salisbury and Jan Smith. The tarts were artfully presented with their fancifully shaped crusts of hearts and stars. These crusts had been made with lard which imparted a delicate melting texture to them. Baked Indian pudding, a mixture of cornmeal, brown sugar and butter had been baked by Isabel Chesak, while Marlborough Pudding (a pie) was done by Mary Lou Nye. This creamy pie consisted of applesauce, cream and lemon, sherry and nutmeg all cooked into a custard. Judy Kales had prepared a delicious bread pudding made with thirder bread, rosewater, milk, eggs and raisins; while Anita Denly offered flavorful apple dumplings. The dumplings had been individually wrapped in cloths, then boiled and their wraps removed allowing them to retain their shape. These were served in a sauce of sweet butter and brown sugar. Beth Riely had made Jumbles-- rich, spicy butter cookies formed into rope-like twists. From Kathleen Curtin there was a spiced cheesecake with ground almonds, a 17th Century British recipe likely to have been retained in our period.

As we enjoyed the various dishes, 18th century music played in the background. Mark Dulcey, husband of Marion Walke, had taped music representative of the country reels and dances common at the time. Period instruments -- fiddles, harpsichords, and dulcimers -- contributed graceful melodies to the event..

The following is the recipe for Baked Indian Pudding prepared by the writer for this banquet.

(Originally from the early 19th Century manuscript of Elizabeth C. Kane of Philadelphia, as published by Jan Langone in 1986, with modern directions and quantities from *The American History Cookbook*, by Mark Zanger).

“One cup of meal, with one quart of Milk, a pint of which make hot and scald the meal, the other half add cold, three eggs, a lump of butter the size of a large walnut, sugar Cinnamon and nutmeg to your taste bake it one hour: you may add a little ginger if you like it -- Either Wine sauce or butter and sugar mixed together.”

Baked Indian Pudding

1 cup yellow cornmeal (stone ground if possible)
1 quart whole milk or half-and-half, plus 2 cups more for optional "whey"
2 extra large eggs
3 tablespoons butter, plus 1 stick for sauce, and some to grease baking dish
3 ounces white or light brown sugar,

plus 1/2 cup for sauce

1 tablespoon mixed cinnamon and nutmeg

1/2 teaspoon ginger

Equipment: 2 or 3 quart baking dish

1. Bring 2 cups of the milk or half-and-half almost to a boil
2. Stir the hot milk carefully into the cornmeal
3. Stir in 3 tablespoons of the butter. Let cool.
4. Break eggs and mix with spices and the 3 oz. sugar
5. Mix 2 more cups of milk with the egg mixture and work everything into the cornmeal.
6. Grease baking dish.
7. Fill baking dish with pudding mixture. (To make "whey", a sweet clear liquid that would be used as a sauce, add another cup or two of cold milk on top of the pudding before it goes into the oven).
8. Bake 1 hour at 350 degrees.
9. For sauce, blend a stick of softened butter with 1/2 cup brown or white sugar -- serve warm, melted over the pudding