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COOKERY AS A FOLK TRADITION IN A MAINE FAMILY

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Cookery as a family folk tradition serves many functions in everyday and holiday life. Besides distinguishing between special occasions, holidays, and seasons, folk cookery traditions are also an interesting means of studying the dynamics of culture and ethnicity within a family. As a folk tradition, cookery skills are handed down orally or written in the form of recipes from generation to generation.. Cooking know-how is not learned in schools or through books, but in a traditional setting from someone who also learned by doing with the help of oral instruction and advice. This oral and learning by doing tradition serves to pass down information on preparing local varities of food, as well as family favorites, and most often includes recipes and customs that have been in the family for generations. It serves to help preserve the important role food plays in everyday and holiday life, reflecting cultural and ethnic influences that have perservered throughout the years. Family history, advice and general bits of information concerning the small things that families invariably take for granted, yet are actually the practices that make them a unique entity within a broader spectrum, are passed along in the tradition of folk cookery. As Yodor points out, the cookery traditions in every family are influenced by " environment, and climate; settlement history, and ethnic demography; changes due to urbanization and innovations in technology; economic history; sociological factors; and religion." (Yodor: :329) Local crops, foods, and seasonal foods are also important factors in what determines a family's cookery traditions.

Although there appears to be a cross-regional eclectic "am "American" tradition of cooking,(or not cooking in the case of fast foods),developing today, it is still possible to view original regional styles and patterns. New England is still rich in traditional foodlore and reflects not only food habits, but the Yankee lifestyle of simplicity and making do with what is available. The Yankee emphasis on utilitarianism is quite evident in folk kitchens where the old adage of "waste not, want not" is exemplified on a daily basis. Finding the subject of folk cookery and its various functions an interesting one, I did not have to go far to find sources of information on traditional New Englaond cookery. My maternal family has lived in the state of Maine for at least five generations and in the interest of documenting some family traditions and finding more out about past and present fones, I elected to interview my living maternal relatives. I looked up several members of my mother's family and eventually interviewed my great aunt, my grandmother, and my mother. Due to illnesses, I was unable to interview my other three living great aunts, and the males are all dead. I sought not to explore my paternal side as interestingly enough, none of my father's family traditions in cookery became integrated with my mother's customs. Why was this? I hope to do some further research and attempt to locate any Scandinavian customs that my father's sisters may have picked up from their mother.

My first source of family history was my grandfather's sister, my great aunt Helen. I was interested in seeing if any customs from my mother's paternal side had become intermeshed with those passed on to her by my grandmother. I was looking for an interaction that had not occurred in my own nuclear family. Aunt Helen was able to provide me with a wealth of information on the types of

able to provide me with a wealth of information on the types of food my great grandmother had prepared on holidays and for everyday consumption, although she could not remember exact recipes. Interestingly enough, aunt Helen didn't learn to cook from her mother while she lived at home, rather she claimed to have learned "by guess and by gosh" once she got married. The kitchen was her mother's domain, so any learning to be done at home had to be from a safe distance. Aunt Helen describes the food her mother served as "good and hearty", consisting of fresh vegetables and fruit, lots of meat and seafood, salads, and "good desserts". A strict rule of no snacking was enforced by her physician father who always answered pleas for sweets with " Just take a glass of water." Aunt Helen recalled breakfasts at her house as being much in the New England tradition of a hearty filling meal. Her mother made hot cereal, corn muffins or bread, or date muffins, and hot cocoa every morning. Aunt Helen continued the hot cereal traditions, but has never considered herself a baker of any sort. She confided that she doesn't considered herself a good cook because she never made her own bread, rolls, or pies. According to her, one should be proficient in all areas of home-baking in order to be called a good cook. She confessed to never having made a pie in all her 83 years, despite the fact that her mother had made them in great quantities and frozen them in the back shed for consumption throughout the winter. She admitted to being quite good at making brownies and at turning out the same sort of hearty food her mother had prepared, but, "I always felt I wouldn't be able to make a good pie, so I never tried, besides, my family didn't like them all that well to begin with." Despite her modesty, Aunt Helen was the

benfactor of several traditional recipes to my field notes, namely her seafood casserole, peanutbutter cookies,(referred to by my family as Aunt Helen's Great Cookies). and choclate nut caramels.

I next went across the street and interviewed Aunt Helen's sister-in-law, my grandmother, to find out what sort of things she had picked up from her mother during her younger years in Caribou, Maine. Like my aunt, my grandmother had also not learned to cook at home. My great grandmother Caswell, like my great grandmother Thompson, did all her family's cooking and preferred not to have her daughters in her way. Since my grandmother didn't learn at home, she relied on her older sisters, other relatives, and friends for cooking advice and recipes. Another reason my grandmother relied on people other than her mother for recipes was because my great grandmother cooked entirely from memory, using dashes of this and handfuls of that, a method my grandmother found to include too much guesswork for a beginner. My grandmother became especially well known for her pies,particularly lemon meringue, and for her breads, of which Anadama and Shredded Wheat are the favorites. (Anadama Bread is one of the most traditional New England yeast breads and recipes for it can be found in almost every family and regional cookbook.) She claims that she got good at these things because "people liked them and they always wanted more." It is my grandmother's unspoken duties to provide the pies and breads on holidays and family get-togethers. Interesting to note is the fact that although my grandmother and her sisters all became proficient cooks, each of them had a distinct specialty. Besides my grandmother, there was a specialist for candy, caokies, and donuts; meats; pickles; and stews, soups and chowders. My

grandmother accounted for this variety of specializations with the statement that everyone seemed good at all things and best at some.

I spoke with my mother last in hopes of finding continuing patterns of traditions and customs. Like Aunt Helen and my grandmother, my mother also did not learn to cook at home. The tradition of the kitchen being the sole domain of the mother, seems to be a definite pattern in my family. To reinforce this pattern even more, I was not a welcome sight in the family kitchen for a number of years. In my case it was because I was a terminal messmaker, but unlike the others, I did learn to cook at a relatively young age, partly because my grandmother and mother taught me, and partly due to the fact that I got to help out when my mother went back to work fulltime. With my grandmother, the prospect of having six daughters in the kitchen with her was too much for my great grand mother and only one of them was evertually allowed to help her. It's through my great aunt Nellie that any of my great grandmother's recipes were saved; my great grandmother didn't use or write down recipes because she couldn't read or write well, everything was in her head. Aunt Nellie memorized how many pinches of this and that went into certain dishes and in this manner, salvaged some family favorites. The ones that got saved, however, were mostly aunt Nellie's favorites (and not all of these were ever written down either), so her self-selection determined what survived. The recipe for the gingerbread that my grandmother made virtually every day while her children were growing up is one of the survivors that is still a family favorite. (Gingerbread has been a popular item in Maine since at least 1802 as is indicated by the records of an Augusta general store which bought it homemade daily from Augusta

a local cook.) (Marriner:1954:118)

Like the others then, my mother learned to cook from relatives, and friends after she got married. In learning to cook, my mother performed the family a great service without realizing it; she found her grandmother's huge wooden file box and copied many of the recipes from it. The file box has long since disappeared and my mother's are the only reords we have of my great grandmother's repetoire. Her seafood dishes and her fruit breads have remained traditional foods in the family repetoire, particularly her seafood casseroles and her Date and Nut Bread. An item that was lost, however, is the recipe to her sugar cookies which my mother describes as having looked and tasted perfect. However, this recipe was in her head and no one thought to get it from her while she was still alive, thus it remains a true family secret.

My mother also built up her own repetoire by making up recipes using ingredients that the family particularly liked. Unlike my grandmother who couldn't learn by her mother's method of "guesstimation", my mother specializes in creating her own recipes either by adapting new recipes to include her favorite staples, or by taking things we already like and adding more favorite things to them. For instance, she has adapted quiches into her core of specialties, but she never fails to add one or more of her nutritional old favorites, such as zuccini or tomatoes from the garden, broccoli, spinach, mushrooms, and various types of cheeses that she always keep on hand. Also, if a new recipe comes along that takes her fancy, if it has potatoes or macaroni in it, she'll generally substitute rice, a staple she and the other cooks in the family are more particular to than those others.

In the course of the interview with both my mother and aunt Helen, it became obvious that our family had a lot of seafood dishes, many of which my mother had gotten from her grandmother. Seafood is a common item in the coastal parts of Maine, but we started to ponder why my great grandmother living in the inland town of Augusta had so many seafood recipes. My mother recalled that my great grandmother had been brought up in Boothbay Harbor where her father had been a physician. It seems that they ate an abundance of seafood, not only because they had easy access to it, but also because the doctor was often paid with it. Much of their diet was dictated by the food they received in payment for his services and since the Boothbay region was heavily populated by fishermen, they received a lot of seafood. My great grandmother eventually married a physician herself and moved with him to Augusta. There again, they were often paid in food, only in this area of the state, the meat was usually that of farm animals and the produce was from local gardens and orchards. Although my great grandmother incorporated these new items into her repetoire, serving many roasts, fresh vegetables, and fruit breads from the local produce, she also continued to cook her more familar seafood dishes, despite the fact that they was difficult to obtain fresh inland. I suspect that the economic circumstances of her family made it easier for her to continue preparing her traditional dishes than for the cook of a less financially secure household. The combination of the seafood with the local foods received in payment for medical services resulted in the family having a widely varied diet, which is still evident in our meals today. As aunt Helen said, this food was of the hearty, filling

Augusta
Boothbay Harbor

type, a style of cooking that has long been a New England tradition. As early as 1651, Judge Samuel Sewall described New England fare as "...varied,...usually in plenty... and never rich" (Chamberlain:1897:208) and still aptly describes the food prepared by my mother today.

The family garden is an important source of food that goes into the makings of a well-rounded and nutritionally healthy diet in New England. My family, like many others in rural New England, eat what we grow and grow what we eat. The garden is the traditional source of fresh vegetables throughout the summer and early fall, with the contents varying from family to family depending on what the favorites are. Other determinants of what is grown are the climate and soil of the area and how inexpensively some vegetables my be purchased at the market. Items such as radishes, onions, turnips, and potatoes are deemed not worth wasting garden space on because they can be obtained at a minimum cost and the quality differences are almost negligible. Garden vegetables are prepared a variety of ways throughout the summer and are consumed boiled, steamed, or raw and in casseroles, salads, and breads. The vegetabels we grow are eaten until they are gone and for the remainder of the year we generally eat the same types purchased frozen from the grocery store. My mother sticks to this core of vegetables, which also include spinach, braccoli, and cauliflower, items we have had little success with in the garden. These vegetables, of which the tomatoes and beans are canned annually, also find their ways into soups, stews and quiches.

My family particularly exemplifies the Yankee tradition of making do with what's available to you in that we use wild items in

our diet. Dandelion greens begin appearing on the table in May, along with fiddleheads and milkweed blossoms. Dandelion greens can be found in most any yard, but fiddleheads and milkweed blossoms must be sought out, fiddleheads being especially difficult to find. If someone has a good fiddleheading spot, it's not too likely they're going to spread the word!! One of the hardest parts of picking fiddleheads is telling the "fiddlehead" fern from the other types of ferns found in Maine.

> " When these little ostrich ferns come up, the heads are covered with a thin brown membrane. That's the reason it's called ostrich. As the head grows, the membrane brakes into flakes. This is the way you tell fiddlehead greens from other ferns, for not all ferns are fiddleheads." (Standish:1969:100)

It's important to pick fiddleheads (providing you can find them) before they grow too tall or else they will have unfurled too much. The milkweed blossoms must also be picked at a certain time, it's important that they're picked while they are green and firm. Cat-o-nine tail blossoms, another wild edible less well known than the others, must also be picked while they are green. This last item isn't eaten very often by my family as they usually go by before anyone remembers to go looking for them. Preparing these wild "vegetables" is quite simple; all that needs to be done is a good washing and then boiling them in water. Robert P. Tristram Coffin once described what he considered to be the proper technique for preparing greens.

> "...greeen are to be boiled right up and down for three or four hours. I know modern dieticians will blanch and hold to the table till their knuckles show white. Let them....Who wants mineral salts and vitamins! You are after bigger game. You aren't after vegetables, You are after life. Something that will stick to your ribs. You are after iron and soul." (Coffin: Mainstays of Maine:81)

While my family is not quite so fanatical about their greens, many Maine families are extremely particular as to how they are prepared, often making a meal out of them by cooking them along with some salt pork. However it is prepared, food that has been foraged for is the essence of the utilitarian tradition.

Wild berries are also avidly sought after, not only for immediate consumption, but also for the purpose of transforming them into jams, jellies, pies, cakes, and muffins. The most commonly picked berries in Maine and the favorites in my family as well, are strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, and blackberries. It's difficult to find great quantities of these wild, so we often resort buying berries at roadsidestands or at the market, and in the case of strawberries, we pick them off commercially cultivated plants. My grandparents had a raspberry and blackberry patch on their farm and every summer we would gather there and pick berries for a day of making jams and jellies. Now that they no longer own it, we don't have access to such large quantities of these berries. For this reason, we no longer have homemade preserves of this type on the table. Strawberry jam is still made most every summer, although some berries are always saved out to be eaten plain, in strwberrry rhubarb pie, and with milk and sugar. Strawberries and cream have long been a New England tradition, Judge Sewall recorded having eaten them on June 5th in his 1686 diary. (Sewall: 1927:39) Maine is particularly famous for its blueberries and consequently most families with some traditional eating habits have a multitude of blueberry recipes. Summertime in Maine brings forth such blueberry desserts as Bluberry Slump, Grunt, Flummery, Buckle, cakes, pancakes, muffins, and the age-old favorite of bluberry pie. Muffins, pies,

and pancakes are what bluberries are traditionally used in in my family. Pies are only made during the summer months with fresh berries, but muffins and pancakes are made off-season as well by using frozen blueberries purchased at the store.

Later in the summer comes canning time with the size of one's garden dictating how much food is put up for use during the rest of the year. My family cans only tomatoes and string bean; tomatoes because everyone likes them and because my mother uses them as the base forstews and other hot dishes, and green beans because my father loves them and purposely plants an abundance of them in hopes of having enough left over to can. Pickling, another very old New England tradition of food preservation, is also carried on in my family. Every summer, my grandmother and her sisters gather at their oldest sister's farm (she's 85) for a day of pickling. Many people pickle only cucumbers, but my family also uses tomatoes, zuccini, onions, and cauliflower. As far as I know, these recipes are not down on paper, a situation that should be remedied soon as no one else in the family has done any pickling but them.

The last session of canning happens in the fall when the apple crop is ready. Homemade applesauce is made by the bowlful, most of which is canned, but some is eaten warm on vanilla ice cream, a traditional family favorite. Until recently, applesauce in my family was made by boiling the apples whole with their skins on, (this gives it the pink color), and then put through a hand food mill. This year technology modernized the process as my mother enlisted the use of a Cuisinart food processor. This makes for a much speedier process with fairly similar results, but it eliminates the feeling of having done it all "by hand", not to mention doing away with

the traditional hot applesauce on ice cream. This tradition is displaced due to the fact that the food processor grinds the apples up raw. (There's really no reason why the applesauce can't be heated up except that that's like cheating somehow.)

My family's everyday mealplan reflects a traditional New England simplicity and heartiness. The breakfasts my mother serves to us, which are the same as those served to her by her mother and to aunt Helen and my grandmother by theirs, consist of hot cereal, bran, blueberry, date or corn muffins, and pancakes. These are very traditional New England items, as is cornbread which was my grandfather's specialty. He always held to the belief that using 2 eggs in your cornbread will keep it from crumbling, and indeed the family recipe for it includes the 2 eggs he advocated. The belief that a good hot breakfast that will stay with you the whole day has persisted in the mothers' of New England families for generations. The climate obviously has much to do with this; food is utilized by the body for energy and heat, thus making a substantial breakfast a good way to hold up against the weather. In recent times, technological advancements have made the cold easier to beat, and the Maine breakfst that was meant to stick to one's ribs and generate heat all day long is not quite so substantial as it once was. Instead of serving every type of breakfast food every morning, many families, including my own, have found it adequate to serve only two or three items. Besides hot cereal, pancakes, which were being made by the colonists as early as 1772 and buckwheat ones by 1805, muffins, and cornbread, which dates back to before 1808, (Booth:1971:179), New Englanders have long been enjoying pie and hulled corn for breakfast. (Booth:1971:131) Eating

pie for breakfast is not a tradition in my family and hasn't been for as long as anyone can remember. However, hulled corn, accompanied by molasses cookies was my grandfather's favorite breakfast. Hulled corn was a preferred way of preparing corn by settlers of my grandfather's ethnic background, Anglo-Saxon. (Booth:1971:131) This custom was not continued in my family after my grandfather's death due to the fact that no one else likes hulled corn. Innovations in mass-marketed breakfst foods have also caused many changes in the traditional morning breakfst, particularly the mass introduction of cold cereals. Shredded Wheat is considered to be the oldest type of dry cereal, making it's appearance before 1900, (Marriner:1954:115), and is my family's favorite staple dry cereal. One of my grandmother's favorite recipes, Shredded Wheat Bread, incorporates this sugarless cereal. The recent glut of the various types of cereal now on the market make a light breakfast possible, as does the marketing of doughnuts, English muffins and products such as Pop Tarts, which replace the once homemade items. These items all reflect a change in lifestyle that has occurred over the generations; no longer does anyone have time to cook huge breakfasts as more and more women are working today, and most people do not afford themselves the luxury of lingering over a hearty morning meal. For the most part however, whether breakfast includes omelets,(Maine is a large egg producing state), bacon;(which accompanied Benedict Arnold up the Kennebec in 1775) (Coffin:1937:105), buckwheat pancakes,(A teaspoon of baking powder will keep them from turning green), or fresh fruit,(which is traditional especially in the summer months), a New England breakfast in its true form is gaurunteed to be filling and nutritious..

Kennebec River

Lunches and dinners in New England reflect a more seasonal variety of foods than does the morning meal. Warm weather lunches and dinners invariably center around the garden vegetables, various types of sandwiches, and fruit salads depending upon what is in season. Cold weather lunches tend to be more substantial than summertime ones and often include the same soups and stews that my freat grandmothers made. These soups and stews are traditionally served with crackers or baking powder biscuits, both in my family and in New England in general. Chicken or turkey soup is a universal favorite, the stock being made of the remains of the bird boiled together with an onion. Only after the flavor is transferred from the bones and meat into the stock is the soup ready to receive carrots, onions, celery, barley, (an essential ingredint to any of my grandmother's mother's soups), and rice. This soup like all others is best if it is allowed to set a while before it is eaten, at least that's what my family has always maintained. Although there are several different types of soups and stews in my mothers and grandmother's repetoires, they all have virtually the same basic ingredients, give or take one or two. For example, my mother's beef stew is exactly like my grandmother's chicken soup with the omission of the chicken and the addition of beef, tomatoes, and turnips. These dishes are just as likely to turn up at dinner-time as at lunch, as is another family and New England favorite, fish chowder. Dinners that center around a soup or stew require little else with them as they are extremely hearty dishes, which could truly be eaten with a fork. Corn bread is just as likely as rolls to accompany ~~to accompany~~ a soup or stew as is a dish of my grandmother's pickles in my family.

Yankee utilitarianism can also be seen at work in the kitchen during the prepartation of casseroles which have long been a way of utilizing leftovers and traditional staples. Casseroles have been a part of New England diet as long as covered dish suppers have been around. Used for years and years at grange hall and church suppers, casseroles are made without recipes by many cooks, due in part to the simplicity of most of them. One such item, and a New England favorite, is Shepard's Pie. A recipe for this dish would read quite simply; place a layer of cooked ground beef, creamed corn, and whipped up potatoes in a baking dish and bake at 350 for about 45 minutes. My grandmother hails from Maine potato country and this is one of the potato dishes she brought down with her. Another family and Maine favorite involving potatoes is Baked Stuffed Potatoes. Simply hollow out the insides of a baked potato, mix potato meat with chopped ham and any type of cheese,(cheddar is best), replace mixture back into potato skins, and bake at 350 for about a half hour.

The New England spirit of traditionalism is never more exemplified by my family than on Saturday nights when the table is spread with homebaked beans, brownbread, cold ham or hotdogs, and cabbage salad. Preparations for this meal begin ritualistically every Friday evening when my mother puts the beans on to soak. This process begins with covering the beans with about 3"of water, (unless you plan on getting up in the night to add more water it's a good idea to start with at least this much), and removing the beans that float to the top. In Mainstays of Maine, Mr. Coffin describes this as the "separation of the sheep from the goats". (Coffin:105). (Actually the beans that float are simply beans with

air pockets in them, but they are always removed regardless of the nature of their flaw.) In the morning, the beans will have absorbed all the water and will be ready to be placed in the bean pot. Mr. Coffin advocates parboiling the beans before placing them in the pot, but in my family this is only done when my mother forgets to place them out to soak the night before as parboiling generally makes for mushy beans. (To each his own, after all, that's what family traditions are all about.) Our beans are actually no longer cooked in a beanpot in the oven, but in a slow cooker Crockpot. Not only is it easier to keep checking the beans as they cook on the counter, but the need to keep the oven on all day is eliminated. Salt pork, a teaspoon of dry mustard, molasses, brown sugar, and a teaspoon of baking soda go into my mother's beans. She doesn't use exactly the same amounts of things each time as she goes more by taste than by measurement. The salt pork and mustard are for flavor, the sugar and molasses are to sweeten the beans,(must be careful not to use too much of either), and the teaspoon of soda is, in my mother's words,"to take out the snappers." The after effects of a baked bean supper were cured in my family some time ago by the passing on of this bit of advice. Since it's next to impossible to consume a whole crock of beans in one sitting, baked beans for breakfast on Sunday mornings have long been a New England tradition.

For the most part, my family's repetoire of everyday foods includes a well-rounded variety of meats, including liver, ham, pork, chicken, turkey, beef, and lots of fish, especially haddock, halibut, sole, and scallops. In the summertime, we occasionally have lobsters and clams, but the in flux of tourists drives the price up high enough to make lobsters a luxury for the locals. My family can be counted on however, to have a "Down East Feast"

every Labor Day to mark the end of the summer. A meal centering around a more everyday type meat that has been a particular New England specialty for generations is New England Boiled Dinner. Usually served on Sunday's in my family, this dinner consists of corned beef simmered in a pot along with potatoes, carrots, parsnips, turnips, andcabbage. In some families, beets are also served with this meal, although they are usually cooked in a separate pot to prevent the entire meal from turning red. This has always been a good Sunday dinner because it can cook while the family is in church and be ready to eat when it arrives home. For generations, Sunday dinners have been the largest meal of the week consisting usually of a roast of some sort, several vegetables from my mother's favorite core, rolls, pickles, salad, and dessert. For years when aunt Helen was growing up, a dessert likely to be served on Sunday's was Marshmallow Pudding. It was made of chopped up marshmallows soaked in milk, then served with whipped cream and walnuts. This item is no longer eaten by my family as it does not score high on my mother's list of nutritional favorites. Week night dinners are usually the largest weekday meal and most often include a tossed salad, a meat dish of some kind, and vegetables. There is nothing gourmet about any of the cooks in my family, especially my mother since she works full-time, the food is always decidedly wholesome and abundant..

Desserts in my family also reflect a concern with nutrition and consist mainly of homemade cookies, pies, fruitbreads, cakes, and ice cream, with as many "good for you" ingredients included in every family recipe as possible. Cakes, cookies, and breads and pies are all ways of using up things that are grown in the garden

or picked from an orchard. Carrotcake, applesaucecake, raw-apple cake, and pumpkincake are the most commonly baked scratch cakes in my family. We have resorted to using convenience mixes upon occasion, but scratch cakes are by far the favorites. Cookies also use ingredients similar to those commonly found in our cakes, such as pumpkin, apples, and applesauce, with the frquent addition of dates, raisins, and nuts. These last three ingredients have been synonymous with the word nutritious in my family for many years. Other cookies that incorporate these traditional favorites are molasses and oatmeal ones, both long time New England staples. My mother never failed to have one kind or another of these waiting for my brother and I when we arrived home from elementary school. Great aunt Helen's Great Cookies, a type of peanutbutter cookie, are another family favorite that meet my mother's test of nutritional value. Filled cookies have always been popular as well although date and nut filled ones were the type most heartily approved of by the head cooks. Choclate chip cookies, perhaps because they contain none of the "big three",(raisins,dates,or nuts), have never been served by the mothers' in my family and not until I was old enough to cook alone in the kitchen did we eat them in my household. Sugar cookies are one type of cookie that is baked only at Christmas-time, very seldom are they made any other time of the year. This practice is quite common in my family, there are several items that are eaten only on a particular holiday; eating them at any other time of the year would detract from their specialness and from the specialness of the holiday itself. Storeboughten cookies have occasionally found their way into the cupboard, but contrary to the situation

in most families, ready made cookies were always considered a real treat by my brother and I! However, even the ones purchased from the store reflect a degree of nutritional scrutiny by my mother, the most frequently purchased store cookie was Fig Newtons.

Fruitbreads are still another type of "nutritional" sweet traditional to my family, and are commonly eaten in various forms all over New England. My great grandmother from Augusta began the tradition of fruit breads in my family and my mother has continued the custom using the recipes she copied from her. Date and Nut bread is frequently served on holidays and family gatherings, it being one of my mother's specialties. Banana-Nut bread is another old family recipe, as are those for apple bread, applesauce bread, carrot bread, zuccini bread, and pumpkin bread. Again, the same basic core of nutritional ingredients is evident, and most of these breads have raisins, dates, and nuts slipped into them somewhere between the bowl and the oven. A family philosophy that is so easily detected is, if it has raisins, dates, and nuts in it, it's good for you and you may eat it, and if it has a fruit or vegetable in there as well, have another!

Another family and New England dessert is the pie, of which no family gathering or holiday is complete without. In New England, one can actually tell what season it is by the type of pies on the table. Fresh berry pies in summer, and apple, pumpkin, squash, mincemeat, and lemon meringue in fall, winter, and spring. My grandmother is the pie-maker in my family, Aunt Helen never having ever attempted one, and my mother being incapable of making the crust. New types of pies are seldom attempted as my grandmother's

Augusta

repetoire is quite set. However, she has taught me to make pies and I have added a new recipe to the family files although it has been a traditional, but less well-known, Maine pie for generations. Oatmeal pie can be made at any time of the year as it requires no seasonal fruits or vegetables and the ingredients it does call for are commonly used staples. Marjorie Standish, an author of several collections of traditional Maine recipes, describes oatmeal pie as Maine's answer to pecan pie and indeed it may well be. Pecans have long been considered a luxury in this area of the country due to price and accessibility so the creation of oatmeal pie, which does taste almost identical to pecan, may have been a result of the New England tradition of "making do". Piemaking has a long history in New England, a recipe for apple pie appears in a cookbook dated 1772, and a tradition which centers around the pie-making process has probably been around almost that long. It is a general practice to use up the left-over crust dough by making a tart, consisting of a little butter, sugar, and cinnamon sprinkled on the rolled out scrap, folded up so the "filling" doesn't run out and baked alongside the pie. (This treat is often given to a young kitchen helper who has yet to develop a taste for pies!)

Making ice cream is a memory many older people recall, when the cranking was all done by hand, not put into an electric ice-cream maker to do all the work. Aunt Helen recalled making ice-cream every Sunday when she was growing up in Augusta. In days before refrigeration, I later wondered how this was possible in the summertime; ice cream makers need a fair-sized quantity of ice or snow. My grandmother hadn't mentioned making ice cream while she lived up in Caribou, so I was doubly curious about the matter

of ice. The answer to how my Augusta family got ice, as I later found out, lies in the fact that the Kennebec River, which runs right through Augusta, was ice harvested all winter. The ice blocks were packed in sawdust to keep them from melting and stored in ice houses where they could be purchased all year-round. There was no such mass storage of ice during my grandmother's early days in Arcostook county. There, ice cream was a treat only if there was snow outside. My family still makes ice cream and can do so on the spur of the moment, thanks to automatic ice-makers, but we still use an old hand crank model.

One of the major functions of traditional cookery is its use in distinguishing holidays and special occasions from other days of the year. Cultural background is especially visible on holiday occasions as traditional ethnic and religiously oriented foods are prepared in commemoration of the event. New England is a source of an abundance of traditional holiday foods, many which are still being prepared in my family.

The first holiday of the year in a protestant New England home which has in the past been observed with traditional foods is George Washington's birthday. I questioned my grandmother and great aunt as to how they their families had done in recognition of this day. Both recalled making cherry pies, which is the traditional New England culinary response, and my grandmother also recalled having had "Washington Pie". She described it as a white cake with white frosting and decorated with bits of cherry. While my grandmother recalled this as having been a common item in Caribou, my aunt had never heard of that tradition around Ausgusta. Washington's

Arcostook County
Augusta
Kennebec River
Caribou

Birthday is no longer made special in my family, the reasons being that my mother doesn't make pies and because no one particularly likes food with cherries in it. (My mother had never heard of Washington Pie until I mentioned it to her, my grandmother didn't continue that tradition with her family, always having made pies instead.)

St. Patrick's Day was the next occasion to come along and my family, like many others, always celebrated it with a New England Boiled Dinner. This holiday is not set apart from other days any longer, mainly due to the fact that my mother doesn't observe it as a religious holiday. (Until my mother, both sides of the family had commemorated the day as being special although neither one has an Irish background.) My mother also ended the tradition of Red Flannel Hash for dinner on the day following St. Patrick's Day, not only because we don't have the boiled dinner in the first place, but also because she doesn't like this sort of hash. (She really isn't as bad as this is making her out to be!) Up until my mother however, Boiled dinners and Red Flannel Hash were always signs that St. Patrick's Day had come and gone.

The next holiday of the year and that is more universally celebrated in New England is Easter. As long as anyone in my family can remember, this holiday has been observed with hot-cross buns and ham. My mother recalls my great grandmother as always baking the hot-cross buns, but today they have been replaced almost every year with the Parker House type rolls. This is mainly because my mother [illegible]ct much of a hand at bread or roll making and finds it easier and less time consuming to resort to the store-boughten type in

the absence of my grandmother, the family breadbaker. The ham is still served, although I am not sure as to why it is ham we eat and not another type of meat except that that is what the family has always had, and also distinguishes Easter Sunday from the other springtime Sundays.

The nationwide celebration of Independence Day is a holiday New England can be counted on to do up in high style. The 4th of July is not the 4th of July in New England unless salmon with egg sauce and peas are served for dinner. (It's always closer each year as to whether the garden peas will be ready by this day .) Another seasonal favorite that is just coming in in time for the 4th is strawberries. Strawberry shortcake is never better than when eaten in the late afternoon on the 4th of July in between dinner and the fireworks. This traditional favorite is served every year and in small towns and villages, a local organization often sponsers a gathering where this dessert is served. The fourth of July is about the only time of year that we eat shortcake or salmon all year, another example of saving certain foods for certain occasions only.

The next holiday which is understandably recognized by traditional foods in the New England region and in my home is Thanksgiving. Regional favorites accompany this customary dinner which is served all over the country, and the New England area is at no loss for Thanksgiving specialties. At my home, Cape Cod cranberries kick off the preparations for this feast; my mother begins making her cranberry-orange-apple relish several days ahead in order that it may set before it is served. My grandmother begins her

piemaking activities a day or so in advance as well, although the pumpkin pies are never made ahead. (My grandmother thinks that letting the pumpkin filling sit in the crust too long makes it soggy.) The mincemeat pie is also a must on Thanksgiving and is a well-known New England specialty. The technique of making mince meat is european in nature and its presence in this area is attributed to the early colonists. It was discovered that storing excess meat in the fall could be done by preserving it with sugar or a sugar-containing ingredient, thus making mincemeat a practical item. (Leonard: 1970:130) Although my grandmother always used to make her own mince-meat, as she got older, she resorted to using the ready-made type; mince of this sort contains raisins and some unidentifiable ingredients, but it remains a tradition nonetheless. My own mother never attempted to make mincemeat, not to mention the pies themselves, and attributes it to a lack of time for such things and a lack of need for any abundance of it. According to aunt Helen, my great grandmother never bothered to make pies on Thanksgiving as she had them already made and frozen in the back shed from the fall. Another Thanksgiving must in my household and others as well, is Indian Pudding. First made in my family by my great grandmothers, recipes for Indian Pudding have been around a long time; the New American Cookery book printed in 1805 printed a recipe quite similar to those in use today. (Smith:1974:196) It's very important to begin this dish first thing on Thanksgiving morning as the longer and more slowly it bakes, the better it is. A coupe of hints for making a good Indian Pudding are not to make it too sweet,(that's what the ice cream, whipped cream, or hard sauce on top is for), and

to stir it often, adding just enough milk to keep it the perfect texture. Ruth Coffin, wife of R.P.T.Coffin, had these words of praise for this dessert which is served only on this day in my family: "It is the best dessert in Christendom. It is as American as maple sugar, popcorn, and barefooted boys. It tastes of all three. It is the silk of the corn and the honey of America." (Coffin:Mainstays of Maine:148)

Since Indian Pudding is meant to be thoroughly enjoyed, we serve it in the early evening when everyone has recovered from dinner.

Dinner, by the way, centers around a good-sized Turkey stuffed with herb seasoned stuffing. (My mother tried a different type of stuffing this year but the family put up such a fuss over it she promised to bring back the herb-seasoned kind next year.) Maine potatoes, baby onions in butter and cream, and garden squash are the traditional Thanksgiving vegetables in my family, and are accompanied by my mother's relish and my grandmother's pickles. While everyone in New England can usually be counted on to have turkey, the choice of vegetables is more likely to vary from family to family. However, when I questioned my grandmother and aunt as to what types they had on Thanksgiving, they gave me identiaal answers, suggesting that perhaps the variation is not very great, at least not within this state. (or at least within the family) I have come to believe that the only consistent differentiating factors from household to household throughout New England are the patterns on the family china and silver. Thanksgiving is one of the few days of the year when all the family treasures are brought out in full force and it is this practice as much as the food that is being served that sets the day off as being special.

The foods that are traditional to my family on this day are

- not a host of other things we have come to associate with Thanksgiving - like potatoes

very much in the New England tradition and accurately reflect my maternal family's ~~Anglo-Saxon~~ English origins. Like many New England families, mine had a representative at the first Thanksgiving at Plymouth , so the traditions we are practicing are actually adaptations to those begun at the earliest Thanksgiving feasts. The foods we still associate with this day that were visible at the early celebrations are cranberries, corn,(cornmeal is basic to Indian Pudding), squash, potatoes, and pumpkins. (Smith:1974:125) Beans and peas were also grown abundantly during colonial times but they do not appear on our table on this day; we eat these two vegetables quite often during the year and they do not convey an aura of specialness. Corn in its unadulterated form was also eaten at the first Thanksgiving, but, again, we do not have it, mainly due to the fact that my father can't eat it. For the most part, however, my family is quite cooperative when it comes to serving a traditional Thanksgiving feast which varies only in the type of pickles my grandmother happens to make that year.

Christmas is the last holiday celebrated with special foods by my family, although as with Easter, the only other religious holiday we recognize, the religious significance of the day is minimal at best. We are not a very outwardly religious family and our holidays center around the preparations for the meal and around the people who have gathered together with us. Holidays are more a chance for a family reunion than occasions of religious significance.

Preparations for Christmas used to begin several weeks in advance, but now that the children in the family are away from home, preparations begin when the last one gets home from college. The

Yuletide season is officially ushered in with the arrival of great aunt Helen's present to the family- home-roasted peanuts and choclate nut caramels. There's no waiting till Christmas Day; everyone knows what's in it and the pre-Christmas days wouldn't be the same without them. She began this tradition because, like the rest of my family, aunt Helen believes that homemade presents are the nicest kind and she knew that nuts and caramels are items everyone likes. Besides the fact that those foods are especially good when they're homemade, cost was an important variable when aunt Helen first made the decision years ago to give a gift of food. The nuts have always been a minimal cost, but the ingredients for the caramel have increased in price tremendously , still, the tradition hasn't been broken for many years. (I got the recipe from her in hopes of maybe someday continuing the custom she began .) The preChristmas days also involve stringing popcorn and cranberries, two very traditional New England items, to decorate the tree with. Not only is this a traditional decoration, but it is in the spirit of utilitarianism as well; after the holiday is over, the strings may be placed in a tree to be eaten by the birds. Popcorn balls are another item made in preparation for the holiday season and have been traditional since my grandmother's mother began making them. Everyone who is around at the time of their creation lends a hand in this operation as it's important to get them made as quickly as possible once the syrup has been added to the popcorn. Overboiling the caramel mixture, as well as working too slowly, has more than once resulted in a huge wooden bowl stuck solid with very hard popcorn.

My mother's fruitbreads abound at this time of year and are given away daily to friends and visitors , but the most extensive

cooking operation is that of making the Christmas cookies. Every year for generations, dozens and dozens of thin, cut-out sugar cookies, decorated with colored sugars and thin icings, are brought to life in our kitchen. Gingerbreadmen are also turned out in great quantities, some to be eaten right away and some to be hung on the tree. Hanging cookies on the tree is a Germanic tradition that is relatively new to my family. When the energy crunch first hit New England, I insisted that lights not be put on the tree and instead, we made it more of a traditionally "home-made" tree. Although the lights have since been reinstated, the gingerbread men have become an integral part of our Christmas decorations.

These special treats are kept on hand throughout the holiday season, but the most looked-forward to food tradition in my family is to be found on the table only once a year. Christmas Eve stew is the king off all stews and preparations for it sometimes begin months in advance. (Lobstermeat left over from a summer bake is sometimes frozen with the intent of saving it to be put into the stew months later.) Originally, Christmas Eve stew contained only oysters and was made by my grandfather for the occasion. Although gone today, oysters were once plentiful in the tidal waters of the Kennebec and Damariscotta Rivers with records indicating that members of the Maine Popham Colony were eating them as early as 1607. My own family's affinity for seafood had a strong influence on this item being served to commemorate Christmas Eve. My mothered altered the contents of the oyster stew, omitting the oysters and adding lobster, fish, clams, scallops, crabmeat, and shrimp, the reason being that my brother and I did not like oysters when we were little. The oysters have since returned to the stew and are kept company by the ingredients my my mother added to the traditional recipe. Christmas Eve

Popham Colony Kennebec River Damariscotta River

stew is always served with homemade biscuits and the table is set with the family silver, china, and linen, sure signs that a holiday has arrived.

Christmas morning brings with it a traditional breakfast as well as the mounds of wrapping paper and bows. Traditional New England breakfast favorites invariably appear, including bacon, eggs, homemade toast and muffins, homemade coffeecake, jelly put up during the summer, and fresh fruit. Dinner is a long time away so it's safe to eat a large breakfast. However, pancakes are considered a little too heavy for special occasions so they are purposely omitted from holiday morning meals.

Christmas dinner is not as looked forward to as other holiday meals in my family, perhaps due to the fact that it is anti-climatic to Christmas Eve stew and to the excitement of the day in general. Also, the fact that dinner is relatively the same as Thanksgiving and that everyone nibbles on the sweets that are distributed throughout the house tend to add to detracting from the novelty of a holiday meal. Christmas dinner includes the New England custom of roast beef along with the same types of vegetables served on Thanksgiving Day. In my family the only variation is the sweet potatoes my mother serves instead of squash. Yorkshire Pudding is a well-known ~~Anglo-Saxon~~ English Christmas tradition but is not a customary item in my family. My mother made it once a few years ago, but she had terrible luck with it and decided not to attempt it again. Plum pudding is another New England favorite traditional to Christmas, but this dessert has not made it to my family's table in many years. My mother recalled that one of the many relatives who used to gather at my

great grandmother's mone at Christmastime used to bring the Plum pudding with him, but no one has made it since. It is not a particular favorite in the family and pies have always been the traditional preferred dessert. Lemon meringue, my grandmother's specialty, and mincemeat are the customary Christmas pies, although lately we have been subject to her whims when it comes to the types of pies she makes.

The only special occasions celebrated several times a year in most every family everywhere is a birthday. In some families, the birthday person has a choice of what foods are served, but in my family tradition dictates angel food cake and boiled frsting. This type of birthday cake has been served on both sides of my mothers maternal family for as long as aunt Helen and my grandmother could remember. A few years ago, my mother attempted to usurp the traditional cake with a dessert that everyone in the family really likes. But, it didn't matter how much we liked it; birthdays mean angel cake with white boiled frosting and substitutions are not acceptable. Needless to say, the presence of the traditional cake has been unchallenged since that incident.

The dynamics of ethnicity and geographical environment are clearly visible when reviewing the traditional foodlore of my maternal family. Its ties to New England and an ~~Anglo-Saxon~~ English Protestant heritage are clearly evident in some of our everyday foods, not to mention our seasonal and holiday cookery traditions. The fact that my family has continued to live in Maine makes it easy for us to maintain our culturally and ethnically inherited tastes. If we NO

longer had access to open fields with berries and "vegetables" in them, or to a garden, or orchards, or to the sea, the repetoires of the family cooks would no doubt change to adapt to the new environment. (Although it seems that somehow traditional favorites would make it to the table on special occasions.) It is not only the traditional presence and taste of certain foods, but also the process of preparing them and smelling them baking that adds to the total experience of belonging to a family whose members have shared and enjoyed the same sensations for generation upon generation. Food is one way of maintaining that unique sense of "us", of belonging to something that is very old and very secure and set in its ways. Although my family has maintained many traditions from generation to generation, discarded or adapted some, and picked up others, there is an easily detectable continuum of folk cookery traditions. In a world that is constantly changing and making "progress", the constancy of family traditions provides people with something to look forward to from year to year and to depend upon when all else is changing and unfamilar. In doing my field work and research for this project, I became extremely aware of the role of food, particularly traditonal items, and how intricately and subtlely it is intertwined with the dynamic forces that serve to maintain a family's uniqueness within the broader spectrum of an eclectic society.

Christmas Eve Stew

(from my mother-; it was originall made by my grandfather every year in the form of oyster stew, but was later modified because my brother and I didn't like oysters when we were little- the oysters returned a few years ago)

1 lb. of whitefish
1 lb. clams
1 lb. oysters
1 lb. shrimp
1 lb. lobster meat
½ lb. crabmeat
½ lb. baby scallops

Prepare the seafood by sauteing in water and butter; add to mixture of 1 can Carnation milk and 2 quarts of whole milk. Season to taste with sherry, salt and pepper. Let it set for at least 24 hours before serving, reheat slowly being careful not to bring it to a boil! Served with homemade rolls every Christmas Eve.

Seafood Casserole

(from my mother who got it from great aunt Helen)

1 can frozen shrimp stew (homemade will do even better)
½ lb. shrimp (or 1 can)
*½ lb. tuna " "
½ lb. crabmeat " "
3 cups cooked rice

Butter, pepper rice- line bottom of casserole dish with layer of rice, cover with layer of shrimp, another layer of rice, cover with tunafish, another layer of rice, cover with crabmeat, finish with layer of rice- pour shrimp stew over entire dish. Bake at 300 for 30-45 minutes.

* Any type of fish may be substituted for this layer

ANADAMA BREAD (from my grandmother Thomps

1 package yeast
¼ cup warm water
2 cups hot water (NOT BOILING)

ADD ½ cup corn meal (pour slowly or it will clump)

½ cup molasses or brown sugar

lump of shortening "the size of an egg"

2 tsp. salt

5 cups of flour (start with 4 and work up, don't let dough get too stiff)

Knead dough approximately 5 minutes, then put in bowl to rise. When it has doubled in bulk, take out of bowl and place on floured board. Cut dough into 2 pieces (you do not need to punch this dough down) and shape into loaves. Let rise covered with damp cloth to prevent dough from drying out, should rise about 2 more hours, may take less. Bake at 350 for approximately 50 minutes. Bread is done if it sounds hollow when you thump it.

SHREDDED WHEAT BREAD (from my grandmother who got it from her sister-in-law, my great aunt Weltha)

2 cups boiling water
2 tbsp. shortening
1 level tsp. salt
third cup of molasses
2 shredded wheat biscuits
1 dry yeast cake
¼ cup warm water
about 5 cups flour (start with 4....)

Measure water, shortening, molasses, and salt into bowl. Crumble shredded wheat into this mixture. Dissolve yeast cake in warm water and add to mixture. Add flour, then turn out onto floured board, knead about 8 minutes. Return bread to bowl and let

rise for about 2 hours. Punch down, make into 2 loaves and let rise for another hour. Turn it out onto board and let dough relax for 10 minutes, then return to pans and bake at 400 for 15 minutes, when brown, turn down to 350 and bake for 45 more minutes.

GRAMPA'S CORN BREAD (JOHNNY CAKE)

(one of my grandfather Thompson's specialties)

1½ cups flour
2/3 cup cornmeal
3 tsps. baking powder
½ tsp. salt
2 eggs (keeps it from crumbling, one is not enough)
1/3 cup sugar
½ cup melted shortening
2/3 cup milk

Mix together and bake in muffin tins or square pan at 400- check to see if it's baking too fast, although you do want it to be nice and crispy on top. Makes one good-sized pan of bread or 12 muffins.

Great Aunt Nellie's Gingerbread

(given to me by my grandmother- was actually their mother's recipe but Nellie was the first to write it down)

½ cup sugar
½ cup molasses
½ shortening
1½ cups flour
1 tsp. soda
½ tsp. salt
1 egg
½ cup boiling water
½ tsp. cinnamon
½ tsp. nutmeg

Combine shortening, egg, molasses, and sugar- beat until creamy, add boiling water, then add dry ingredients. Bake at 350 until toothpick comes out clean.

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Date Nut Bread

(from my mother, who got it from my great grandmother's recipe box.)

13/4 cups sugar
1 tbsp. melted butter
11/2 cups quartered dates) let stand
11/2 cups boiling water)
1 egg
2 tsp. soda
water from dates
23/4 cups flour
1 tsp, vanilla
1 cup nuts
1 tsp. salt

Cream sugar and butter, add eggs and water from dates. Add dry ingredients, then vanilla, dates, and nuts. Bake 1 hour in 2 greased and floured bread pans at 350. Serve with cream cheese or butter, or as is.

Indian Pudding

(a Thanksgiving specialty that's been on the tables of both sides of my family for at least 4 generations)

1 quart milk
1/2 cup molasses
1/2 cup cornmeal
lump of butter the size of an egg
dash of salt
1/2 tsp. ginger
1/2 tsp. cinnamon
1 beaten egg

*** All measurements are approximations as the recipe isn't written down anywhere

Scald 3 cups of milk, then add molasses and cornmeal; stir over heat until this thickens. Add butter, salt, spices, and egg, mix thoroughly. Pour into well greased baking dish and bake in a slow oven (200 is ideal) for hours and hours. Stir occasionally and add additional milk when it looks like it could use some. Once pudding has thickened, add lots of raisins and chopped dates. Serve warm topped with hard sauce, vanilla ice cream, whipped cream, or butter. This dessert is heaven on earth for my family.

GREAT AUNT HELEN'S CHOCLATE NUT CARAMELS

(given to me by aunt Helen- these are one of her annual X-mas presents to the family

***
1/2 lb. baking choclate
3 cups brown sugar
3 cups granulated sugar
1 bottle light Karo syrup
1/2 lb. butter
1 pint cream
4 tbsps. vanilla
nut meats as desired

Combine choclate, sugars, sugars, Karo butter, and cream. Slowly bring to a boil- stirring to make sure butter and choclate melt and don't burn. Cook to 248° or a hard ball which does not flatten in cold water. Add vanilla and nuts. Pour candy quickly into buttered pan. Allow to come firm in cool place. Overnight is recommended, but not in refrigerator.

***"I use half the recipe." (aunt Helen)

OATMEAL PIE

(a traditional Maine recipe that is new to the family repetoire)

3/4 cup quick oatmeal, uncooked
3/4 dark corn syrup
1 cup sugar
1 cup flaked cocoanut
1 stick melted margarine
3.4 cup milk
2 eggs, beaten
pinch of salt
1/2 tsp. vanilla

Combine all ingredients, pour into a 9" unbaked pie crust. Bake at 350° for 40 minutes. Place on rack to cool. (May be served with ice cream or whipped cream on top.)

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Interviews..... Helen Thompson Furbish November 25, 1980 Augusta

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