

THE FOOD JOURNAL

Dedicated to pursuing food history and supporting culinary collections at the Los Angeles Public Library



Charles Perry
CHSC President

Land of Many Baklavas

For years I have been proposing that baklava arose in Azerbaijan, which is conveniently situated between the Persian culinary sphere, with its tradition of nut-filled pastries, and Central Asia, where medieval Turkish nomads had developed a tradition of making layered breads. Some of those breads are in effect just stacked tortillas, others are made by cooking a thin flatbread, flipping it over, slapping another sheet of raw dough on the cooked side, and repeating six or seven times, and still others by other techniques.

The killer evidence is that the sort of baklava traditional in Baku is simply thin flatbreads alternating with six to eight layers of ground nuts. The baklava we know, with its single layer of filling sandwiched within scores of crisp sheets of filo, was presumably elaborated from something like this idea for the famously sweet-toothed sultans of Istanbul.

This July I had a chance to study Azerbaijani baklava on its home ground (where the name is pronounced *pakhlava*), thanks to a tour led by CHSC member Feride Buyuran. First, I found that the layers of pastry in Baku-style baklava are not as thick as an Azerbaijani pastry-maker's handbook had suggested to me; they're about as delicate as filo. It's basically a great big pile of ground nuts with a tiny bit of pastry. You get the impression that the filo is only there to keep the filling from falling apart. *Continued on page 7*



Nancy Zaslavsky
CHSC Vice President,
Programs

Program Notes

We are thrilled that you are enjoying our monthly programs at the downtown Central Library's Taper Auditorium and at various locations throughout the year with the Speakers Bureau outreach programs. We must be doing something right because CHSC has been active since 1995—that's 24 years. I raise my glass in a Happy New Year toast to another 24! Here's a friendly reminder that our still-inexpensive dues are due every January and 100% of funds collected (dues and donations) go directly to CHSC expenses and LAPL because we are all volunteers. Please rejoin via chsocial.org or with Membership Chair Susanna Erdos and your check, cash, or credit card at the lobby membership desk on program dates.

Thank you to Sheila Anderzunas's terrific party committee for a sold out event at La Casita del Arroyo in Pasadena. This October's festivities included everyone's potluck dish to enhance the theme, "Dinner with Charles Lummis at El Alisal." Don Corbett coordinated a slew of exciting items for the silent auction—enormous thanks to Don and everyone who donated and bid!

Let's go down Memory Lane and recall the second half of 2018's program line-up packed with inspiring authors. Jonathan Kauffman spoke in September on "Hippie Food" from his book, *Hippie Food: How Back-to-the-Landers, Longhairs, and Revolutionaries Changed the Way We Eat*. October introduced us to the dynamic Sarah Lohman (another revolutionary!) with "Eight Flavors and the Revolutionary Story of Black Pepper" from her, *Eight Flavors: The World Story of American Cuisine*. November transported Sarah Portnoy across the freeway from USC to speak on "Latino Food Culture in L.A." from her well-researched, *Food, Health, and Culture in Latino Los Angeles*. To wrap up the year, Jeff Keasberry entertained us with "Exploring Indo Dutch Fusion" from his, *Indo Dutch Kitchen Secrets: Stories and Favorite Family Recipes*. *Continued on page 7*



Upcoming Programs at the Central Library's Mark Taper Auditorium:

January 12, 2019
Charles Perry
"So You're Dining With the Persian Emperor"

February 9, 2019
Joan Nathan
"Jewish Food: In the American South and Around the World"

March 9, 2019
Jim Dodge
"My Life in Pastry"

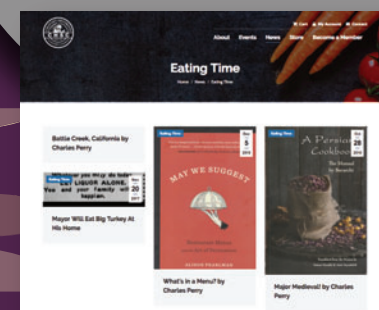
April 13, 2019
Josh Donald
on knives and their maintenance

May 11, 2019
George Geary
"History of Crazy Foods from the Boardwalk to the Midway"

June 8, 2019
Joshua Lurie
on the L.A. food scene

Try Eating Time

We are reviving our blog, which will feature book reviews and odd notes about food history. It's called Eating Time (get it?). Check it out: <https://www.chsocial.org/news/eating-time/>



Annual Members Party



Event photos credit: Nancy Zaslavsky

A delicious feast was enjoyed by attendees at this year's Annual Members Party at La Casita del Arroyo in Pasadena. Potluck meals were prepared in the spirit of influential and controversial Los Angeles luminary Charles Lummis and the many dinner parties he held at his home, El Alisal. Many thanks to Sheila Anderzunas and her party committee. Cheers also to Don Corbett for coordinating the event's Silent Auction which helped raise \$1600 for CHSC.



The California Bear-Chef first appeared in the *Pan-Pacific Cook Book*, 1915.



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The Culinary Historians of Southern California
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The Culinary Historians of Southern California acknowledges the generosity of members who have joined or renewed at the Angel, Benefactor and Patron levels. Your gift allows our organization to enhance member services and increase our support of the culinary collections of The Central Library.

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Oldest restaurant in Los Angeles County? Saugus Cafe in Santa Clarita, according to ABC TV's "Eye on L.A." It opened in 1886 and is still serving locals 24 hours a day: <http://the-original-saugus-cafe-usa.com>



Events Around Los Angeles

Coffee & Donut Festival So Cal
February 23, 2019, 8 AM - 3 PM
National Orange Show Event Center,
San Bernardino
<https://www.coffeedonutfest.com/socal>



Join us for a day of donut-eating contests, competitions, prizes, an awesome kid zone, live music and a drawing for a spectacular new Gretsch guitar. Vote for your favorite coffee and donut in the 2019 "People's Favorite" award. Don't forget to get a photo with the 2019 Donut Queen. Yes, we know - a dream come true. You "DONUT" want to miss this!

Inland Empire Vegan Festival
March 30, 2019, 12 PM - 7 PM
Rancho Cucamonga Epicenter Stadium
<https://www.ieveganfest.com/>



Free entry. Free parking. This is a family friendly food and live music celebration featuring vegan food and animal-free products. We're excited to showcase the variety of plant based deliciousness and cruelty free merchandise the growing vegan community has to offer. Percentage of event sales go toward providing plant based meals for those in need.

Meading at the Garden
April 6, 2019, 11 AM - 5 PM
Alta Vista Botanical Gardens, Vista
<https://meadingatthegarden.org/>



Largest mead festival on the west coast with over 35 meaderies, cideries, and breweries, plus food and music. Win raffle prizes, bid in a silent auction for uncommon mead and beer, experience honey tasting and meadmaking demonstrations, a game area, virtual reality tent, and explore the viking-themed village featuring a mead hall, axe-throwing, live blacksmithing and leatherworking.

LAWineFest
June 1-2, 2019
The Pike Outlets, Long Beach
<http://www.lawinefest.com/>



With over 130 wineries, spirits and thirst-quenching craft beers, great food, music, and seminars on saké, scotch, bourbon, and cheese, this is a weekend you will enjoy. This year will feature several notable restaurants from the Los Angeles area, where you can sample or purchase meals, in a fun, relaxed environment.

Santa Barbara French Festival
July 13-14, 2019 11 AM - 7 PM
Oak Park, Santa Barbara
<http://www.frenchfestival.com/>



Oo la la! Celebrate Bastille Day and the resilient, rich and entertaining French culture. Santa Barbara celebrates its nickname, "the American Riviera," and offers non-stop entertainment on 3 stages, including cancan, French Polynesian, West African Belly Dancing, accordion and drag review performances while chefs prepare everything from crepes to Cajun. Eiffel Tower. Poodle Parade. Fun for the whole family.

Tequila & Taco Festival
July 20-21, 2019, 11:30 AM - 6 PM
Plaza Park, Ventura
<https://www.tequilaandtacomusicfestival.com/ventura>



Two days of fun in the sun! Top-shelf Tequilas sampling (Sat. only), while you enjoy the best gourmet tacos. Enjoy live music, award-winning Margaritas, craft beer, and art vendors. Proceeds benefit Food Share Ventura County's Food Bank.

Smorgasburg LA
Every Sunday, 10 AM - 4 PM
ROW DTLA, Downtown LA
<http://la.smorgasburg.com/>



The largest open-air food market in Los Angeles since 2016. Features over 90 food and shopping vendors, plus a beer garden offering local craft beer and micheladas. Cultural events, live DJs, pop-ups, and other surprises. A new parking garage for more than 4,000 cars is available to park. The *New York Times* dubbed Smorgasburg in Brooklyn, NY as "The Woodstock of Eating."

A Letter from the Editor

Ever wondered about the names of your neighborhood grocery stores? It's actually an interesting part of our larger Los Angeles culinary history. For example, Ralph's started in 1873 at 6th Street & Spring and fulfilled a need for a community supermarket after decades of paltry grocery offerings. They became established by focusing on affluent "carriage trade" customers and delivering groceries to their homes. Yet its founder, George A. Ralphs, never intended to get into the food biz. An unfortunate hunting accident that took away part of his arms prevented him from working as a bricklayer, so he took up grocery clerking before starting his store with a partner. The Ralphs chain currently has over 200 locations and is the oldest chain west of the Mississippi River.



As for Vons, founder Charles Von der Ahe, an immigrant from Denmark, also started his store in Downtown at 7th Street and Figueroa in 1906 and called it "Von's Groceteria." By 1928, the chain included 87 stores, which luckily for him, he sold before the stock market crash in 1929. Though the Great Depression followed, he helped his sons revive the family business as the Vons Grocery Company. Today they operate stores across 35 states and somewhere along the way, the apostrophe got dropped from their name.

What about Trader Joe's? Founder Joe Coulombe started with his Pronto Markets in Los Angeles as convenience stores in 1958, but discovered that he needed to distinguish his stores from the burgeoning 7-Elevens. The tiki trend was in full swing in the 1960s and Trader Vic's restaurants were popular, so he introduced his concept of a nautical trading post, complete with Hawaiian shirts and job titles like "crew member" and "captain."

And Smart and Final? Sounds like catchy name about your shopping experience, but there was actually a Mr. Smart and a Mr. Final in Southern California who founded this chain.

Want to know more? Check out KCRW's "Good Food" podcast with radio producer Gideon Brower: https://soundcloud.com/kcrws-good-food/04_gf_090713_gideon-brower-mp3/s-caWfZ

Sharon Tani
 Sharon Tani



Story of the Popsicle

Ancient Roman slaves were sent up into the mountains to retrieve blocks of ice, which were then crushed and served with fruit and spice syrups. Marco Polo enjoyed sorbets when he traveled to the Chinese court of Kublai Khan. Thomas Jefferson entertained many visitors with iced sorbets and freezes.

Of course, none of these treats had a handle, an invention credited to Frank Epperson. Frank was just a boy in 1905 in Oakland, California, when one night he accidentally left a glass – filled with water, powdered soda mix and a wooden stick for stirring – outside overnight. When he found the glass in the morning, the mixture was frozen solid, so he ran the glass under hot water and removed the ice pop using the stick as a handle. He knew he had a great idea on his hands, kept making the pops for his friends, and when he became an adult, made them for his own children. In 1923, he filed for a patent for his invention. Up until then, he had been calling the frozen treats "Eppsicles," but his children insisted on calling them "Pop's 'sicles." The latter name stuck and the Popsicle was born. The frozen treat was an immediate success.

The first Popsicles sold for just 5¢ and came in seven flavors (including cherry, which is still the most popular flavor). At the height of the Depression, the double-stick Popsicle was introduced and allowed two children to share a pop for the same price as a single.

Source: Butler, S. (2013, August 16). Frozen History: The Story of the Popsicle. <https://www.history.com/news/frozen-history-the-story-of-the-popsicle>

The Culinary Historians of Southern California

www.chsocal.org

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Susan Orlean Ignites Library Love

By Stella Mittelbach, CHSC Library Liaison

The publication of Susan Orlean's *The Library Book* in October 2018 thrust Los Angeles Public Library into the spotlight this year. The best-selling author's love letter to libraries weaves a narrative about Central Library's infamous 1986 fire with threads about her own relationship to libraries, the life of suspected arsonist Harry Peak, staff's memories of Central Library, and LAPL history.

Orlean kicked off her book tour with two events at LAPL. On October 14th, to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the reopening of Central Library, she appeared in conversation with author/book critic, David Ulin, at the Mark Taper Auditorium. Two days later she sat down for the Library Foundation's Aloud program where she was interviewed by award-winning author Attica Locke.

"It was the largest library fire in the history of the United States," explained Orlean, "400,000 books destroyed, 700,000 damaged." She went on, "There was a point when the Fire Department did

actually believe this was a lost cause." Though *The Library Book* does not focus extensively on the culinary collection, at the Aloud event, Orlean lamented, "Entire sections were gone. The entire cookbook section which was at that time one of the biggest in the United States was all gone. The entire collection was gone." Dan Strehl, who was a librarian

at Central Library at the time, further clarified by email that "something like 5000 cookbooks" had "water damage" from the fire hoses. Some of the wet books were saved by freeze drying and are still on the shelf today. On a brighter note, in Chapter 28 of the book, Orlean highlights LAPL's current "huge collection of restaurant menus" and mentions "Librarians Dan [Strehl] and Billie Connor started the collection."

As of the writing of this article, *The Library Book* has spent seven weeks on the *New York Times* Best Sellers list for Hardcover Nonfiction. Who knows what new visitors the book will draw to discover LAPL's architecture and collections?



The Library Book Author Susan Orlean with Author/Book Critic David Ulin in the Mark Taper Auditorium at the Central Library.

Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library

Mapping Culinary Landmarks

The Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs has initiated a project to identify places that are important to culinary history and food culture, and they're asking the Culinary Historians for help. Our goal is to create a website to encourage both Metro Rail riders and people who are in cars to explore both current and historic culinary neighborhoods of Los Angeles. Please nominate landmarks you think are relevant by visiting the form below, explaining why they are significant.

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSE7LUbztS6LRyu5A7RiyBSWCnXvR6jOSJ7145UPA0gr1sBBA/viewform>

There is also a space for short stories and reminiscences about food culture and history experiences. Note that you are encouraged to nominate multiple places and send this form as many times as you like. This is an ongoing project but we want the website up and running by March first, and we appreciate your early response.

This project is being coordinated by CHSC Board Member Richard Foss.

Thank you for participating

Nancy Zaslavsky, Program Notes: Continued from Page 1

If you haven't opened the CHSC website for a while please take a look at our new blog page. The latest post is Charles Perry's review of an important historic translation of the *Kärnäme* (1521) by two Iranian scholars. The website also offers videos of monthly programs you may have missed and information on upcoming programs. Also see Upcoming Dates on the Journal's front page for future programs.

Charles Perry, Land of Many Baklavas: Continued from Page 1

In Gabala, they also use filo, but in a more familiar way. They cut it in long strips, fold a triangular section of the pastry over a nut filling (this is called *uç qulaq* or triangle baklava), and then keep folding over and over until you reach the end of the strip, much the way you fold up a flag. In the great filo craze of the Eighties, people often used this technique, carefully buttering the filo to make sure the resulting pastry would be crisp when baked. In Gabala they don't bake these baklavas (they fry them), and they don't dose them with syrup. The result is crunchy, rather than crisp, and lighter than the baklavas we know. I was very fond of it. By the way, they usually make up a big batch of triangles and keep them in the pantry for frying up when wanted.

The most distinctive Azerbaijani baklavas are made from rice batter. Yes, *rice*, making these the crunchiest, and also the only gluten-free, baklavas in the world. Specialist bakers have heated brass sheets on which they dribble the batter in delicate doilies, which they arrange in a stack of eight, top it with a whole mess of ground nuts (usually a mixture of walnuts and hazelnuts spiced with cinnamon and cardamom) and then finish off with another layer of rice doilies. The resulting disk is cooked, decorated with saffron, and flavored with honey or syrup.

In Guba the disk is cut in the usual baklava diamonds, each topped with a half walnut, and saturated with honey. The classiest variety, I thought, is from Sheki (where it is called *halva*, not *pakhlava*). It comes out as a big elegant disk decorated with delicate lines of a sort of saffron ink. Here's a picture.



Photo credit: Feride Buyuran

CANDY QUIZ

Think you know your sweets?
Test your candy connoisseur knowledge.

1. Put these candies in order from oldest to newest:



2. Which holiday has the highest candy sales?

- A. Halloween
- B. Valentine's Day
- C. Christmas
- D. Easter
- E. Mother's Day

3. Which candy did NOT originate in America?



4. Match the candy with the slogan:



- A. Taste the rainbow
- B. Get the Sensation
- C. Melts in your mouth, not in your hands
- D. Sometimes you feel like a nut. Sometimes you don't.
- E. Taste the explosion.
- F. It's too good for the kids



5. Which candy was originally named, "Chicken Feed?"

- A. Candy Corn
- B. Wright's Pink Popcorn
- C. Zagnut Candy Bar

6. What was the profession of the inventor of cotton candy?

- A. Architect
- B. Hair Stylist
- C. Dentist
- D. Cotton Farmer

7. Which candy is NOT manufactured by Mars, Inc.?



8. Which candy was named after a beloved horse?



10. True or False? Salt Water Taffy got its name during an Atlantic City flood.



ANSWERS:

1. C (Cracker Jack, 1893), B (Hershey's Kisses, 1907), A (Bit-O-Honey, 1924), D (Double Bubble, 1928). Sources: <https://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entry.php?rec=158>, https://www.hersheys.com/en_us/our-story/our-history.html, <http://pearsonscandy.com/candy/bit-o-honey>, <https://www.history.com/news/chew-on-this-the-history-of-gum>

2. D. Easter. Americans bought \$823 million in creme-filled eggs, chocolate rabbits and marshmallow Peeps, according to Nielsen data, in 2015. Source: <https://www.cnbc.com/2016/03/24/easter-wins-the-candy-battle.html>

3. C. In 1920, Hans Riegel of Bonn, Germany, became frustrated with his dead-end job as a confectionary worker and started his own sweets company using a copper kettle and marble slab in his kitchen. His bicycle-riding wife was the sole delivery person. The company name combines of the first two letters of his own first and last names and hometown: Hans Riegel of Bonn = Haribo. Source: <https://www.bonappetit.com/entertaining-style/pop-culture/article/history-gummy-bears>

6. C. Perversely, cotton candy was invented by dentist William Morrison, with the help of confectioner John C. Wharton in 1897. At the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904, they sold 68,655 helpings of this "fairy floss." Source: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/people-and-culture/food/the-plate/2016/07/the-sticky-sweet-history-of-cotton-candy/>

7. D. Reese's Peanut Butter Cups are a Hershey's Brand product. Sources: <https://www.mars.com/global/brands/confectionery>, https://www.hersheys.com/reeses/en_us/products/reeses-peanut-butter-cups.html

8. B. The candy bar is named after one of Frank Mars' favorite horses, Snickers. Source: <https://www.thedailymeal.com/cook/10-things-you-didnt-know-about-snickers/slide-2>

9. False. All three chocolate products are owned by the same company. Source: <https://www.russellstover.com/rsc-history>

4. 1: York Peppermint Pattie: Get the Sensation
2: M&M's: Melts in your mouth, not in your hands
3: Pop Rocks: Taste the explosion.
4: Mounds and Almond Joy: Sometimes you feel like a nut. Sometimes you don't.
5: Skittles: Taste the rainbow
6: Toffifay: It's too good for the kids
Source: <https://www.metv.com/quiz/can-you-name-the-popular-candy-based-on-its-catchy-slogan>

5. A. Candy corn was first called "Chicken Feed." The boxes were illustrated with a colorful rooster logo and a tag line that read: "Something worth crowing for." Source: <https://www.bhg.com/halloween/recipes/the-history-of-candy-corn/>

10. True. A huge storm hit Atlantic City in 1883 and ocean water flooded a candy store on the boardwalk. A young girl asked if they still had taffy for sale and owner David Bradley jokingly told the girl to grab some "salt water taffy." Source: <https://www.candyusa.com/candy-types/taffy/>



FOOD LANDSCAPES BY CARL WARNER

Making landscapes out of food seems a rather unusual thing to do for a living, and people often ask, "What made you start doing this?"

Transforming one thing into another is nothing new to any of us. I believe that creativity is in our nature, and is one of the greatest gifts we possess. As an only child I spent a lot of time alone in my bedroom drawing and designing ships, spacecraft, futuristic buildings, and alien worlds. The walls of my room were covered with art posters of painters and illustrators such as Salvador Dali, Patrick Woodroffe, and Roger Dean. For me, drawing and music were a means of escape into other worlds and alternate realities, and this provided the means to stimulate and exercise the muscles of my imagination.

This went on for years, until I discovered photography. I found that I could photograph the real world but make it surreal by the techniques and processes I was able to use in the camera and in the darkroom. At the same time, album cover art was in its heyday, and graphic designers were



creating amazing surreal images using photography for bands like Pink Floyd. I knew then that this was what I wanted to do with my life.

After a degree in Photography, Film and Television at the London College of Printing, I soon found work as an assistant to photographers in the advertising industry. It was the mid-eighties and advertising was the new rock and roll. The London agencies were leading the world with boundless creativity and obscene budgets matched only by the egos of those who squandered their clients' money with ferocious hedonistic fervor. Toward the end of the nineties, the advertising business had become a fickle mistress who came and went as she pleased, leaving me and many others like me in a roller-coaster ride of famine and feast.

In the autumn of 1999, things were pretty quiet in my studio and I needed to come up with something different, something that no one to my knowledge had done. I was greatly inspired by the work of Tessa Traeger, a food photographer who published a book called *Visual Feast* in which she had made pictures using food. Most of these were very painterly and two-dimensional in construction. I wondered whether I might be able to take this further and create three-dimensional works using food, but it was only a thought and I didn't have any ideas about how I might achieve this.

Before we had the Internet, photographers would spend a great deal of time wandering around markets and junk shops looking for oddities to photograph. It was one of these excursions that brought me to the mushroom stall of a fruit and vegetable market, where I found some amazing portobello mushrooms. Their curving trunks and parasol canopies reminded me of trees from some African savannah, and I wondered if I would be able to create a tabletop scene that would give the impression of a much larger-scale landscape. So with a bag full of mushrooms, bulgar wheat, rice, and beans to make a stony ground, I headed back to the studio to see if it would work.

That was how I began making food landscapes. I did one or two to start out with and then began to get commissions from advertising agencies and food clients throughout Europe, and by the end of 2007 I had accumulated enough of them to be considered a body of work, and then it really began to take off. In January of 2008, I received an e-mail from a press agency that had seen the images on the Internet via one of those sites that trawl the Net looking for interesting material. The agency wanted to pitch my story and the food landscape images to newspapers, as they thought it would make for an interesting article. I happily agreed but added that I had been doing these for ten years and I doubted whether anyone would be interested. I was so very wrong. The *Sunday Times* ran a quarter-page article and on Monday, I had a full-page in the *Daily Mail*, the *Mirror*, and the *Sun*. I got to my studio to receive a barrage of calls from TV and radio stations. That was quite a day!

After that the images were blogged and PDFs sent around the globe in viral e-mails. Schoolteachers began sending me photos of food landscapes made by their children in art classes, painters in South America wanted to collaborate with me on projects, people wanted them for chopping boards and jigsaw puzzles, calendars and "in flight" menus. I've had exhibitions at food fairs and gastronomy events throughout Europe and even in Hong Kong.

I work closely with model makers, food stylists, and retouchers to create the final images. Without their help, these pictures would simply have never been as well as you see them now. I hope that you will appreciate the fruit (and veggies) of our labors so far, and enjoy exploring the scenes as much as we have enjoyed creating them.

Carl Warner was born in Liverpool, England and is the author of *Food Landscapes*. Although he still operates from his studio in London, he lives in the Kent countryside with his wife and four children, whose fickle eating habits have inspired him to make food more interesting to children as well as adults in an attempt to encourage healthy eating. A keen musician, he has played in many bands over the years and still keeps a large drum kit in his garage, which he plays on every day to relieve the frustrations of working with vegetables that won't quite behave themselves.

www.carlwarner.com • Instagram name: carlwarner5188

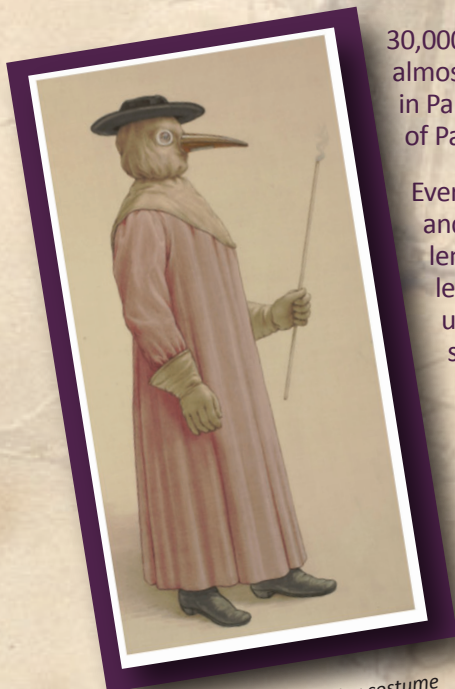


LEMONADE AND THE PLAGUE

BY TOM NEALON

We've all had the opportunity to enjoy a lemonade - on a porch, a beach, at a barbecue, after donating plasma because the gig economy has ruined our life, etc. etc., but we never wonder what lemonade has been doing on its own time, when we're not thirsty. In the interest of remedying that, just a little, I'd like to tell a story of what lemonade was doing in Paris three-hundred and forty-nine summers ago. Lemons have been used for making drinks since before the Ancient Egyptians, are often used to detoxify or soothe a sore throat, but that year, the fate of Paris may have hinged on one of its lesser known properties.

PANIC-STRICKEN PARISIAN PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICIALS IMPOSED QUARANTINES AND EMBARGOES IN THE HOPE OF MITIGATING INEVITABLE DISASTER - BUT THE DREADED PESTILENCE NEVER STRUCK.



The famous plague doctor costume of the seventeenth century. The long "beak" contained herbs and vinegars thought to protect against miasmas. Watercolor, c. 1910.

In 1668, the bubonic plague, dormant for a decade, returned to France and was threatening Paris. It had been reported in Normandy and Picardy: in Soissons, Amiens, and then, terrifyingly, just downstream of the capital along the Seine, in Rouen. Everyone knew what this meant. Only a few years previously, between 1665 and 1666, London had lost over 100,000 people to the plague - almost a quarter of the population. Many still remembered 1630, when the disease had killed nearly a third of Venice's 140,000 inhabitants, and almost half of Milan's 130,000. Panic-stricken Parisian public health officials imposed quarantines and embargoes in the hope of mitigating inevitable disaster - but the dreaded pestilence never struck.

The plague that loomed over Paris was the midpoint of a seventeenth-century European epidemic that would go on to decimate Vienna (80,000 in 1679), Prague (80,000 in 1681) and Malta (11,000 in 1675). The body count in Amiens would end up topping 30,000, and almost no city in France was spared - except for Paris, which, miraculously, survived almost completely unscathed. Lemons had been used in medicine for centuries, but, this one summer in Paris, maybe everything lined up to give lemonade just enough leverage to keep tens of thousands of Parisians from joining the victims in London, Vienna, and Milan, of Europe's last Great Plague.

Ever since the late 1650s, Romans and their visitors had been treated to a huge range of soft, hard and mixed drinks, available both in cafes and from street vendors; most popular among them was lemonade. Cost, and the limited geographical scope of suitable farmland for lemon trees had held lemonade back, but when hardier, juicier varieties of lemon were cultivated and trade routes sped up, its price came down, and its popularity skyrocketed. As befits its delicious and refreshing simplicity, soon everyone in Rome wanted lemonade on a sultry summer's day, and vendors began to carry tanks of it around the city on their backs.

Parisian visitors to The Eternal City - such as the modestly diabolical Cardinal Mazarin (1602-61), who had succeeded the extremely diabolical Cardinal Richelieu (1585-1642) as chief minister to the King of France - left wondering why they didn't have limonadiers carrying fresh beverages around their own fair city. Lemonade was already known in Paris: it had appeared in François Pierre La Varenne's groundbreaking *Le Cuisinier François* (1651), a cookbook so popular and influential that it was translated into English two years after publication and remained in print for over a century. Shortly before his death, Cardinal Mazarin - who liked nothing better than new things he could tax - brought limonadiers to Paris.



A caricature of a French lemonade merchant, after Henry William Bunbury (1771).

WORLD-CLASS MEGALOMANIAC THAT HE WAS, EVEN MAZARIN COULD NOT HAVE GUESSED THAT LEMONADE MIGHT HAVE SAVED SO MANY LIVES, IN A FEW SHORT YEARS.

World-class megalomaniac that he was, even Mazarin could not have guessed that lemonade might have saved so many lives, in a few short years.

The bubonic plague that was spreading through Europe is generally believed to have been transmitted by flea bites. Many now believe that the fleas were transported aboard gerbils, themselves incidental passengers on ships from the Far East. When these gerbils arrived in Europe, their fleas spread to the extensive and ubiquitous European rat population. Fleas carrying the plague virus were distributed around cities by rats, switching from rats to humans or domesticated animals as their rat hosts succumbed to plague, and back to other rats as they killed their human hosts. Rats could just as easily blame humans for transmitting the fleas back to the rat population and, for all we know, they do. The key to this method of transmission is how intimately urban rats and humans live with each other: everywhere people create organic refuse, so go rats. Despite the devastation associated with the bubonic plague, it is actually a surprisingly fragile construct that leads to its spread through a metropolis. Each element in the chain - flea, rat, human - has to be set up perfectly for the plague bacterium to cause an epidemic, or it will fizzle out. This is thought to be why, thankfully, the plague only struck every few hundred years, rather than constantly cycling through Europe - and it also explains why it was disrupted in Paris, in 1668.

MILLIONS OF DESICCATED FLEAS MUST HAVE PINED FOR THOSE GERBILS AS THEY DIED IN THE STREETS, WHILE THE RATS AND HUMANS ENJOYED THEIR GOOD FORTUNE.

Lemonade was not only popular, but suddenly everywhere; carried by limonadiers into every profitable corner of the city. The limonene contained in lemons (and other citrus fruits) is a natural insecticide and insect repellent. The most effective part of the lemon is the limonene-rich peel. Indeed, after centuries of discovery of chemical insect repellents, the United States Environmental Protection Agency still lists fifteen insecticides in which limonene is the chief active ingredient, including both general bug sprays and products for pet flea and tick control. The French were piling lemon peels in the best possible place to disrupt the flea-rat-human-rat chain: the trash. The rats would not only have been unbothered by the huge quantities of lemon, but, being omnivorous, no doubt eager to try this new flavour. It would not have been possible for fleas to survive in the general refuse or in sewers, normally good places to find rats, as they would have been loaded with limonene. Millions of desiccated fleas must have pined for those gerbils as they died in the streets, while the rats and humans enjoyed their good fortune. Paris emerged alive, and refreshed.

In the years that followed, all sorts of people tried to take credit for saving Paris from the recurrence of the plague. Gabriel Nicolas de la Reynie, appointed the first Lieutenant General of the Police of Paris in 1667 basically built his reputation for progressive law enforcement on it. Ministers such as Jean-Baptiste Colbert, who pushed through trade restrictions requiring the careful airing of goods before they were brought into Paris, along with the six major guilds and the magistrate Jacques Belin ecstatically dislocated their shoulders patting themselves on the back. The royal counselors who watched them do it hired people to pat them on the back and Louis XIV (1638-1715) celebrated by annexing several more Belgian towns from the Spanish. But one of these days, some in Paris will come to their senses and erect a bronze statue of a limodier, staring boldly ahead with casting a used-up lemon over their shoulder into a pile of rubbish. Maybe it will even bear the legend: *Les rats, désolé, nous toujours avons pensé qu'il était vous.* (* Sorry rats, we always thought it was you).

So next summer, and every summer, enjoy a lemonade, or even a shandy, but pour a little out for those rats, so many of whom died saving Paris while humans stood around wringing their hands.



Satire of an elderly man buying a glass of lemonade from a street vendor (1814).



Tom Nealon is a food writer and antiquarian bookseller who specializes in early printed books, literature, and anything to do with the often elusive history of food. He is the author of *Food Fights and Culture Wars: A Secret History of Taste* and his work has appeared in *Slate*, *The Boston Globe*, and *Hilobrow.com*. He lives with his wife and two children in Boston where he runs Pazzo Books and occasionally insists that he is one of the world's leading authorities on condiments.

