



PORTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 98, Portland, CT 06480

MARCH 2017 NEWSLETTER

Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History
492 Main St., Portland, CT 06480 Tel: 860-342-5455
www.PortlandHistSoc.com Email: PortlandHistSoc@yahoo.com

Vol. 4 No. 1

The Life of Pye:

Food in New England in the 18th Century

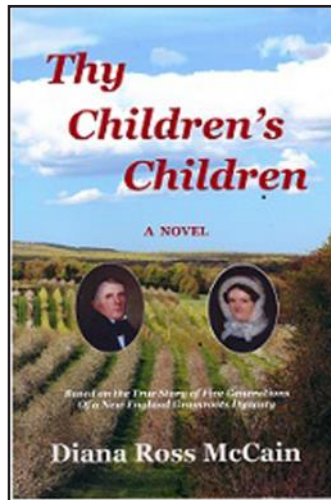
Most of us are familiar with the saying “As American as Apple Pie,” however history tells us that the saying is not particularly accurate. First, unlike plums and persimmons, apples are not native to America. However they were among the first items brought over and planted by the colonists, with the Roxbury Russet thought to be the first type of apple tree planted in Massachusetts in the 1630’s. New England farmers established orchards, often before other crops were planted. Pye (the original spelling of pie) is also not native to the Americas. Pyes were invented in ancient times, but certainly the English perfected the art. Pyes were a staple in their diets and thus also of the colonists here. However, their pyes were not the pies we know today.

The original purpose of a pye was a way to facilitate cooking. Often people didn’t have iron vessels for cooking so they created a “coffin,” what today we

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Society News

The Annual Membership Meeting was held January 29th at the Waverly Center. The Society welcomed local historian Diana Ross McCain as the featured speaker. With approximately 40 people in attendance, Ms. McCain shared her decades-long process of using historical fiction as a portal to the past, which culminated in her recently published work of fiction “Thy Children’s Children,” based on research



into five generations of the Lyman family of Middlefield, Connecticut. Spanning 130 years of local history, she shared her passion for America’s past by discussing the meticulous research she did on this remarkable farming family and the 1,100 acres it developed since 1741 to become one of the most

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21st Annual Town-Wide Tag Sale

It’s that time again! **May 13th** will be this year’s *Town-Wide Tag Sale day*. It is an opportunity for you to *Reduce, Reuse and Recycle*, or just enjoy a day shopping all over town.

This town-wide event, publicized widely throughout the central CT area, is the Society’s largest fundraiser of the year, and can be a fundraiser for you, your family or your organization. Many organizations have invented creative strategies for raising money while so many shoppers are visiting town from all over the state.

You can support the Portland Historical Society with a small \$20 or \$25 donation to secure an authorized tag sale location on the official map. We will create a

large map with all the sale locations and types of items to be found at each location. Non-profit organizations raising money get special highlights on the map.

If you need a location, consider a sale at the Hemlock Grange parking lot on Sage Hollow Road.

If you just want to donate items, the Society and other town organizations will be collecting for their tag sales. Volunteers from the Society will be receiving items in good condition at the Ruth Callander House garage, 492 Main Street, from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. Saturdays, April 22, 29 and May 6.

See page 3 for the Tag Sale registration form with all the details.

The Life of Pye: Food in New England in the 18th Century

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would call a crust in which to cook their food. Their coffins bear no resemblance to our modern day crusts. Originally they were made of flour and water and were very thick and hard, even a few inches thick. The crust was the pot! The pilgrims, for instance, who had very little cast iron with them in the first few years, cooked much of their foods in pyes. The “coffins” were not meant to be eaten and in fact were considered inedible, although they were sometimes fed to farm animals or even poor servants. As fat sources became available, they were added to the flour and water to take us a step closer to the piecrusts we know today. By the second half of the 18th century, crusts, which they called “pastes” were still considered a utilitarian item and the idea of making a flaky crust was just starting to take shape.

Even as the “coffins” became edible, that wasn’t their main function. Their job was to hold the food together, protect it from bugs and spoiling, and make it easier to eat and transport. Without refrigeration, preservation of food was a constant struggle. A pye with a thick coffin protected the contents not only from bugs but also from air and thus from spoiling rapidly. When even the likes of John and Abigail Adams were expected to BYOSW (Bring Your Own Silverware) to dinner parties, the pye facilitated eating without the benefit of any cutlery (akin to a sandwich). Even the Adams, however, would not have eaten food off of their forks. Their forks, with very sharp tines, were

considered dangerous and were meant to hold food, and instead they scooped food onto their knives which were duller and thus considered “safer.”

It’s likely that around the time of the revolution most Portland (Chatham) residents, and most colonists, may have eaten pie everyday, but still their pies were not like ours. Most of their pies were savory and not sweet, and they may in fact have still been scooping the cooked food out of their pyes. Although good examples of many cooking vessels from the 18th century still exist in museums, antique shops and private collections, there really aren’t any pie plates or tins. Our forefathers would have mostly made their pies with straight sides in their cast iron pots. Pie plates don’t become common use items until the 19th century (it is however thought that the pilgrims may have come up with the idea of pies with slanted sides as a way to make the limited amount of food that they had look more substantial). One thing that the Americans did seem to bring to pie making is the addition of more fruits. The abundance of fruits in the colonies encouraged them to add them to their pies but often mixed with meat. Even when they made entirely fruit pies, they tended to use little if any sugar. So maybe with that in mind, it is not so wrong to say “As American as Apple Pie.” Apples weren’t native to the Americas and Americans certainly didn’t invent pies, but they may have been the first to create an Apple Pie as we know it today.

Alexia Belperron

At our March 12th Open House, we hope you will stop by and join us as we will be trying out some historic “pye receipts” (pie recipes) at the Deacon Samuel Hall house, including the one below.

“Onion Pye Receipt”

Hannah Glass, “The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy” 1747, England

Wash and pare some potatoes and cut them in slices, peel some onions, cut them in slices, pare some apples and slice them, make a good crust, cover your dish, lay a quarter of a pound of butter all over, take a quarter of an ounce of mace beat fine, a nutmeg grated, a teaspoonful of beaten pepper, three teaspoonfuls of salt; mix all together, strew some over the butter, lay a layer of potatoes, a layer of onions, a layer of apples, and a layer of eggs, and so on till you have filled your pie, strewing a little of the seasoning between each layer, and a quarter of a pound of butter in bits, and six spoonfuls of water; close your pie, and bake it an hour and a half.

A pound of potatoes, a pound of onions, a pound of apples, and twelve eggs will do.



21st Annual Town-Wide Tag Sale
Sponsored by The Portland Historical Society
Benefiting the Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History

PLAN A TAG SALE

Saturday, May 13th
8:30 AM to 2:30 PM

RAIN
OR SHINE

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION:

- ⇒ You profit from your sale.
- ⇒ The Historical Society will help to promote your Tag Sale.
- ⇒ Your contributions will help fund the Museum of Portland History.

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY WILL PROVIDE:

- ⇒ Location Maps with sale item types
- ⇒ Advertising
- ⇒ Tag Sale Hints
- ⇒ House Marker/Trail Number Sign

| Option | How it works: | Rec'd by Society by April 15th | Rec'd by Society Apr. 16 - 30 <u>deadline</u> |
|--------|--|--|---|
| 1. | Have a sale at your own home or neighborhood <i>for your benefit</i> . | \$20. | \$25. |
| or 2. | Tailgate your tag sale at Hemlock Grange parking area, jct. Rte. 17 & Sage Hollow Rd | \$20. | \$25. |
| or 3. | Donate items to benefit the Historical Society tag sale at the Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History. (No unwieldy items, please.) | Items may be delivered to the Society Saturdays, April 22, 29, & May 6 at the Callander House garage, 492 Main St. from 9-11 AM. Pickup also available. Call 860-342-1927. | |

ALSO BAKE & TAG SALES with coffee, soda & hot dogs at Hemlock Grange, 17 Sage Hollow Road on Tag Sale Day. *Questions? Contact 860-342-1927 or PortlandCThistory@gmail.com*



Clip and mail to Portland Historical Society Tag Sale, P. O. Box 98, Portland, CT 06480
Make checks payable to: Portland Historical Society

| | | | |
|--|---|------------------------------------|---------------|
| Contact Information: Name: _____ | Options (Please check all that apply) | BY April 15 | April 16 - 30 |
| Sale Address: _____ | | <input type="checkbox"/> Home sale | \$20. |
| Phone: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Tailgate at Grange (limit 2/sale) | \$20. | \$25. |
| Email: _____ | Item types (for map listing - 40 characters or less): _____ | | |
| Will you have Tag Sale if it rains? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | | | |
| Must be received by April 30 for listing on Map | | | |

Society News, continued

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popular family attractions in New England today: Lyman Orchards. The author of five non-fiction books, Ms. McCain read passages from this, her debut novel, and then answered an assortment of questions from her receptive audience. Afterwards, while apple-themed refreshments were enjoyed, she autographed copies of her 627-page book which was published last year. - Julie Macksoud

During the business meeting prior to the program, the members present reviewed and approved the annual budget, and elected the slate of new officers. **Congratulations and thank you to the new board:** President George Gilbert, 1st Vice President John Peterson, 2nd Vice President Julie Macksoud, Treasurer James McCabe, Corresponding Secretary Shelli Nolan, Recording Secretary Deborah Ellsworth, Director Eileen Marino (3 year term), Director Martha Lutecki (filling Julie's 2 year remaining term). Alexia Belperron continues as Director with 1 year remaining to her term. - Claire Frisbie



A meal cooks on the hearth during last November's Hearth Cooking Demonstration. Don't miss our next Hearth Cooking Demonstration and Tasting Sunday, March 12, 2 to 4 p.m. during the Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History Open House.

NEWSLETTER - Claire Frisbie, 3-1-2017, 860-335-8581

March 2017 Newsletter!

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2017 SOCIETY OFFICERS

21st ANNUAL TOWN-WIDE TAG SALE
May 13, 2017 - Registration enclosed

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U.S. POSTAGE PAID
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PORTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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