**Chew on This: Presenting the History of Food in Massachusetts**  
**Massachusetts History Workshop, June 1, 2015**  
**College of the Holy Cross; Worcester, Massachusetts**

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**Workshop: You Don’t Know Beans ‘til You Ask Someone: Oral History and Community**

- There’s an old saying that was popular and depicted on early- to mid-20th century postcards: “You Don’t Know Beans ‘til You Come to Boston.” That’s the inspiration for this workshop and beans comprise one way to discover the rich cultural—and culinary—diversity of Massachusetts. And it’s easily adapted to any grade level or audience.

- Folklorists use oral history as a method to document the past—and present—by drawing on the knowledge of individuals and communities based on their personal experiences, cultural practices, or local lore. Through recorded interviews, as well as photographs, material objects, written documents, foodways, and even landscapes and the built environment, these ethnographies often create the first tangible record—where none existed except in memory—of people, places, everyday life, historical events, or customs and traditions. Classrooms and museum galleries are an ideal place in which to elicit these stories and exchanges.

- Food and music are the two easiest points of entry into cultures. It’s said that we are what we eat, but folklorists believe that what we eat symbolizes who we are. Food is central to our identities, and its customs, beliefs, production, preparation techniques and materials, rituals, and traditions are cultural artifacts called foodways. Food and music come together in families, communities, and at festivals. When we eat other people’s foods and experience their music, we discover how much we have in common, rather than what separates us.

- Communities can be long-settled or newly-arrived, place-based, ethnic, occupational, linguistic, etc. Students and museum visitors are tradition-bearers and sharing their folklife can teach larger lessons about culture--geography, history, chemistry, natural resources, economics, herbal lore and folk medicine, math, climatology, etc.--and about tradition and change.

- Ideally, this workshop will give you some skills and road-tested classroom exercises using the tools of folklorists to document and demonstrate how the family story, the community history, and the significant events of humanity are regularly expressed throughout the Commonwealth, the region, and the world through culture.


**Suggested Readings in Oral History**

(these texts are considered among the best resources in the field)


Edward 'Sandy' Ives was a long-time professor of anthropology at the University of Maine and started the Northeast Folklore Archives, now renamed the Maine Folklife Center.


From the British perspective with life history questions and the philosophy of oral history.

**Suggested Websites for Oral History**

Smithsonian Center for Folklife & Cultural Heritage:

[www.folklife.si.edu/explore/Resources/InterviewGuid/InterviewGuide_home.html](http://www.folklife.si.edu/explore/Resources/InterviewGuid/InterviewGuide_home.html)

*Folklife and Fieldwork: A Layman’s Introduction to Field Techniques*

classic guide online at:

[www.loc.gov/folklife/fiedlwork/index.html](http://www.loc.gov/folklife/fiedlwork/index.html)

Vermont Folklife Center’s guide for evaluating and selecting recording equipment:

[www.vermontfolklifecenter.org/res_audioequip.htm](http://www.vermontfolklifecenter.org/res_audioequip.htm)

Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center/Library of Congress guidelines, suggested questions, general how to do oral history projects:

[www.loc.gov/vets](http://www.loc.gov/vets)

Oral History Association: [www.oralhistory.org](http://www.oralhistory.org)

(The New England Oral History Association is currently dormant)

American Folklore Society: [www.afsnet.org](http://www.afsnet.org)

(Founded in Cambridge in 1888)

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**Free Regional Festivals with Traditional Foodways & On-stage Interviews**

American Folk Festival, Bangor, Maine: [www.americanfolkfestival.com](http://www.americanfolkfestival.com)

Lowell Folk Festival, Lowell, MA: [www.lowellfolkfestival.org](http://www.lowellfolkfestival.org)

Working Waterfront Festival, New Bedford, MA.: [www.workingwaterfrontfestival.org](http://www.workingwaterfrontfestival.org)

Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, Washington, DC: [www.si.edu/folklife](http://www.si.edu/folklife)
Bibliography/Resources


Eff, Elaine. *You should have been here yesterday: A Guide to Cultural Documentation in Maryland*. Crownsville, MD: Maryland Historical Trust, 1995.


Gutman, Richard J.S. *American Diner: Then and Now*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1993. [Diners started in Providence, RI, and many were manufactured in Massachusetts. Diner exhibit at Johnson & Wales museum in Providence.]

Holtzberg, Maggie. *Keepers of Tradition: Art and Folk Heritage in Massachusetts*. U of Massachusetts P, 2008. [Holtzberg is Massachusetts state folklorist & the book showcases many years’ fieldwork throughout the Commonwealth by her and others; also basis for a museum exhibit.]


Oliver, Sandy. *Saltwater Foodways: New Englanders and Their Food at Sea and Ashore In the 19th Century*. Mystic, CT: Mystic Seaport Museum, 1996.


Rahn, Millie. “Laying a Place at the Table: Creating Public Foodways Models from Scratch.” *Journal of American Folklore* 471 (Winter 2006).


Tolstrup, Karen Dodge. "If Maine Had a Queen": *The Life of Brownie Schrumpf*. Orono, ME: Maine Folklife Center, U of Maine, 2008. [For many years Brownie Schrumpf was the food writer for the *Bangor Daily News*. Her collection of objects and papers is at the Page Farm & Home Museum at the U of Maine.]


**Important Cookbooks**


**Important Research Collections in Massachusetts**


[www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/library](http://www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/library)

*Collection includes historic cookbooks, culinary history, etiquette, papers of Julia Child; Judy Chicago's The Dinner Party; Boston settlement houses [teaching 'American' cooking to immigrants]; Elizabeth David & Avis DeVoto; Women's Educational & Industrial Union (Boston); and much, more.*

Sophia Smith Collection, Women's History Archives, Smith College. Northampton.

[www.smith.edu](http://www.smith.edu)

*Collection includes papers of Lillian Moller Gilbreth, industrial and domestic engineer and pioneer of time/motion studies; and more.*

**Exhibitions/Brochures/Workbooks**


[www.nhhistory.org/museumexhibits/kitchens/americaskitchens.html](http://www.nhhistory.org/museumexhibits/kitchens/americaskitchens.html)


*FOOD: Transforming the American Table 1950-2000*. [Includes *Bon Appétit! Julia Child's Kitchen at the Smithsonian*. [www.americanhistory.si.edu](http://www.americanhistory.si.edu)


**Websites [just a sampling]**

American Folklife Center, Library of Congress: www.loc.gov/folklife

Association for the Study of Food and Society: www.food-culture.org

Christmas food traditions: www.foodtimeline.org/christmasfood.htm

Documentary Educational Resources. Ethnographic, documentary, and nonfictional films from around the world: http://www.der.org

Folkstreams: Documentary Films about American Roots Culture [videos produced out of primary fieldwork and interviews]: http://www.folkstreams.net

General: www.foodandculture.org [Produced by a folklorist].

General: www.foodhistory.com


*Key Ingredients: America by Food:* www.keyingredients.org

Kitchen Sisters. www.kitchensisters.org

Louisiana Voices/Louisiana’s Many Food Traditions: www.louisianavoices.org

Maine Folklife Center online exhibits: bean-hole beans, women’s work, Maine lumber woods: www.umaine.edu/folklife/exhibits


Maryland Traditions: decoy carving, Smith Island layer cake (official dessert of Maryland): www.marylandtraditions.org

Massachusetts Cultural Council’s Folk Arts & Heritage website & blog: www.massfolkarts.org

Native Voices, Maine Indian History and Culture at the Hudson Museum, University of Maine: www.umaine.edu/hudsonmuseum/video.html

New Hampshire State Council on the Arts’ folklife website: www.nh.gov/folklife/

Northeast Historic Film. www.oldfilm.org [Superb collection of historic regional New England films, including foodways; Bucksport, Maine.]


Slow Food. www.slowfood.com

Southern Foodways Alliance. www.SouthernFoodways.com

StoryBank Maine: http://www.storybankmaine.org

Thanksgiving History. www.plimoth.org [Plimoth Plantation, Plymouth, MA]

Vermont Deer Stories: www.vermontfolklifecenter.org/multimedia/radio/deer-stories/

Vermont Folklife Center: vermontfolklifecenter.org

Voices from the Dust Bowl: http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/afrchtst/tshome.html


*Voices from the Port* radio project, Working Waterfront Festival Oral History Project, New Bedford, Massachusetts: www.workingwaterfrontfestival.org. Seasons 1 & 2

YouTube: *Great Depression Cooking with Clara* and lots more
From interviews conducted at the Working Waterfront Festivals in New Bedford:

*Most cooks were cranky, they were cranky old men. And if you went down in the icebox, 'cause there was no refrigeration, it was ice, at like quarter past seven to open it for whatever reason, I mean you never had any luncheon meat or anything like that so maybe you wanted a drink of milk or somethin', you went down there, he'd get right aggravated and they'd tell you, 'Get the hell out of here!' So you learnt to stay out of the foc'sle. But we did eat very well. Actually we ate better than our families did at home. And that used to run through my mind too... I'd sit there and think, 'God, we're throwin' away better food than I have home for my children. --Herman Bruce*

Retired fisherman Herman Bruce has been involved in the New Bedford fishing industry for 55 years. His parents came from Newfoundland. From an oral history interview conducted at the 2010 Working Waterfront Festival.

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*I start cooking only five years ago...I never cooked before. I probably could not even fry an egg...I just became a cook for necessity. When the scallops became more abundant, which was about four or five years ago, I start cooking to free up the crew completely from that responsibility, and at the same time to make sure that everybody got a couple of good decent meals every day...If have a good, hearty meal, you take a little longer to eat it, you relax better, you go to bed happier, and a busy crew is a happy crew, but a good, fat crew is even happier. --Armando Estudante*

Armando Estudante is a New Bedford scallop captain and vessel owner who emigrated from Portugal in 1978.

**Community Documentation Resources for Teachers:**

City Lore Interviewing Guide:
www.locallearningnetwork.org/local-learning-tools/great-interview-guides/

Tenement House Museum Oral History Lesson Plans:
www.tenement.org/education_lessonplans.html

Madison Wisconsin Children’s Museum’s Kid’s and Teacher’s Guides to Local Culture:
www.artsboard.wisconsin.gov/docview.asp?docid=18876&locid=171
www.artsboard.wisconsin.gov/docview.asp?docid=18875&locid=171
Oral History in the Classroom:

Is interdisciplinary
- fosters critical inquiry skills
- enhances oral, written, and documentary communication skills
- develops research skills
- relates social studies to students’ lives and communities
- integrates the use of technology into the study of history

Reaches all learners regardless of ability or learning style
- teaches auditory and visual modes of documentation and presentation
- provides opportunities for collaborative learning and active exploration
- succeeds not just with gifted students but also average students and students with learning disabilities

Enhances student self-esteem and identity
- enriches student understanding of who they are and how they are connected to others in their community
- enables students to explore their own family and community history and to become knowledgeable experts
- makes the past/history real

Helps reach “at-risk” students
- makes education/school relevant to students’ everyday lives
- makes students’ everyday lives relevant to education

Fosters community and family involvement in education
- encourages positive family communication and collaboration
- promotes intergenerational contact and respect
- promotes community-based learning

Adapted from an unpublished DRAFT of Standards for Folklife Education. Created by the Folklife Advisory Committee of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and Pennsylvania Heritage Affairs Commission in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Department of Education. (November, 23, 1994)