

Celebrating January thaw

by Lydia Lovell

From Aunt Olivia's Kitchen

Although a year seems a long time when we look forward to a particular pleasant happening 12 months in the future, time takes on a different perspective when we look back. And, as we grow older and look back, even many years seem to become compressed and to have passed in too short a span of time. "Can it," we ask ourselves, "possibly be 40 years since I was a bride?" The reason time telescopes, of course, is our own faulty memories coupled with the fact that during much of our lives, not much out-of-the-ordinary happens. We spend most days routinely and are contented to do so. Repetition translates to security in our experience.

During a year, however, each week is marked by a special quality; those qualities, in themselves, become routine in time. Some things, like January's lengthening days, follow exactly the same pattern, year after year; other things, equally as dependable, like the phases of the moon, vary from year to year. And while weather is never entirely predictable, nearly every year brings a January thaw. Uncle Henry used to say the thaw would come in the third week of the month, but sometimes it was early, sometimes late. In all honesty, there have been Januaries with no thaw at all, just as there have been Januaries without even a freeze. But such occurrences are rare, and this year's pattern will probably be quite normal.

Cooking practice today has changed considerably since Aunt Olivia presided in her large, cheerful kitchen; modern appliances do make work easier. One thing that never changes, though, is our desire for three square meals a day and the need to adjust menus to seasons, as well as to family's appetites. Cucumber and watercress sandwiches are hardly a suitable choice for lunch on a chilly January day, for example. A better selection might be **Salmon Casserole** as Aunt Olivia prepared it to yield four servings.

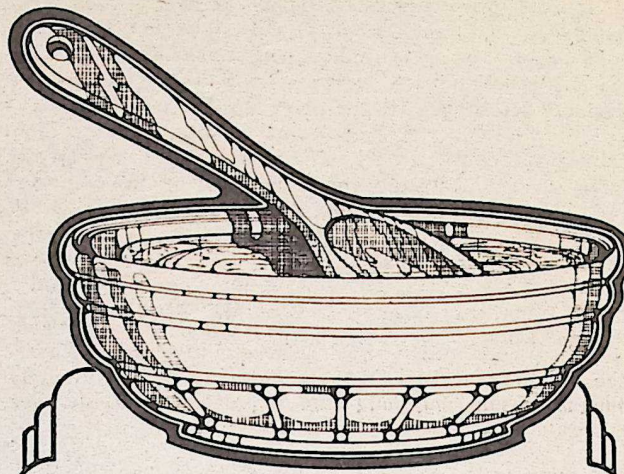
1 15-oz. tin pink salmon 4 eggs
4-8 slices French bread 1/2 t. thyme
2 C. shredded Monterey 1/4 t. salt
Jack cheese 1/8 t. cayenne
2-1/2 C. milk

Drain canned salmon; discard liquid. Slice enough bread 1/2" thick to fit snugly into bottom of a greased 8" square casserole dish or baking pan. Flake salmon in bit-size pieces and distribute evenly over bread slices. Scatter half of the cheese over the salmon. Beat the eggs, add milk and seasonings, and mix thoroughly. Slowly pour over fish. Sprinkle rest of cheese on top.

In a baking pan somewhat larger than the casserole dish, put 1" of water. Place casserole in larger pan. Bake in a preheated 300° oven for an hour and 15 minutes. Remove from oven and allow to stand for another 15 minutes before serving.

Any canned fish (tuna, crab, shrimp, lobster) or left-over cooked turkey or chicken can be substituted for salmon. In a pinch, double the quantity of cheese and omit meat entirely. Still delicious.

Aunt Olivia often served a bacon and cheese casserole that closely resembles a dish now to be found on many French restaurant menus and called **Quiche Lorraine**.



3 lightly beaten eggs 1/4 C. minced onion
1 C. coffee cream 1 C. grated Swiss cheese
10 slices crisp-fried bacon 1/4 t. salt
3 T. prepared mustard Pinch of pepper
One unbaked 9" pastry shell

Preheat oven to 375°. Beat eggs, add cream, crumble in the bacon, and stir in all the rest of the filling ingredients. Pour into pie shell (if frozen, thaw shell before filling). Bake 40 minutes until blade of knife inserted in center comes out clean. **Bacon-Cheese Pie**, as Aunt Olivia called it, serves six when accompanied by a tossed green salad and sliced tomatoes. Should there be any left over, refrigerate and serve cold or reheat in a toaster oven. Cut into bite-size wedges, leftover pie makes a nice appetizer.

Speaking of appetizers, here's a versatile favorite of the Lovells, one that may be prepared as a canape, that can stand alone as a main luncheon course with cole slaw, and that makes a hearty side dish if the meat course is just a bit skimpy. **Spinach Supreme** turns spinach-haters into spinach-lovers!

1 pkg. fresh or frozen spinach 1/4 C. fine-chopped chives
1 8-oz. pkg. cream cheese Several slices French bread
Grated Parmesan Cheese

Cook spinach. Drain in a sieve, squeezing out excess liquid. Turn onto wooden chopping board and chop coarsely. In the top of a double boiler, melt the cream cheese. Stir in chopped chives. (If you have no chives, use 2 T. minced scallions.) Add spinach. Slice French bread 1/2" thick and butter one side. Spread buttered side with cheese mixture, sprinkle with Parmesan, and arrange in a single layer on a baking sheet. Run under the broiler until lightly brown. Serve pronto.

Would you like to try a different dip-and-chip? When Uncle Henry was a young man and before he and Aunt Olivia were married, he sailed as mate aboard a coasting schooner to various ports along the eastern seaboard. On one such voyage, a young seaman who came originally from Macon, Georgia, joined the crew. He and Uncle Henry became fast friends and when the ship put into Uncle Henry's home port, he invited his friend to come home to "meet 'livey, my love, and her lovely sister, Cara" (my mother). The southerner had heard a good deal about both young ladies during the long

hours of standing watch and he accepted the invitation promptly.

His visit was a grand success even though Cara's betrothal to my father (which had been announced during Uncle Henry's absence at sea) put the kibosh on any budding romance between her and the Georgian. For Olivia, Henry's guest was a welcome source of information about preparing foods in ways new to her. Well before she married, Olivia's interest in cooking blossomed and one thing she learned from the Georgian was to make these chips. The dip evolved later.

Toasted Yam Chips are best served with Aunt Olivia's **Yam Dip**. Mix up the dip first and refrigerate it several hours so flavors blend.

1 8-oz. pkg. cream cheese at room temperature
1 4-oz. pkg. blue cheese at room temperature
1 C. sour cream
3 T. chopped fresh parsley
1/4 t. caraway seeds or, if preferred, 1/2 t. celery seed

Cream cheeses and sour cream together until smooth. Stir in parsley and seeds. Cover and keep cool.

The **Chips**? Just as easy.

3 peeled raw yams 1/4 C. vegetable oil

Cut raw yams into 1/8" slices. Brush both sides with vegetable oil. Arrange chips in a single layer on an ungreased cookie sheet. Bake at 350° for 12 minutes. Flip and bake as long again until both sides are lightly toasted and center is tender. Serve warm or cold.

If you try yam chips with yam-chip-dip and like them, you may also find **Yam Cookies** are to your taste. These are rich cookies with only a hint of yam flavor, but their popularity continues among Lovells as it has for generations. Uncle Henry would settle for a few of these for dessert almost any time. Makes about four dozen cookies.

2 small yams, 3/4 C. mashed 3/4 C. old-fashioned oatmeal
1/4 C. butter or margarine, raw
softened 1 t. baking soda
1/2 C. packed dark brown sugar 1/4 t. mace
2 large eggs 1/4 t. salt
1 t. vanilla extract 3/4 C. coarsely broken pecans
3/4 C. flour 3/4 C. chopped pitted dates

Boil yams in water 45 minutes until fork-tender; cool, peel, and mash. In a medium bowl, cream shortening and brown sugar until light, add eggs one at a time, beating after each, and add vanilla. Beat in mashed yams. In a larger bowl, combine flour, oatmeal, baking soda, mace, and salt. Add wet mixture to dry ingredients, stirring thoroughly. Mix in nuts and dates. Drop by tablespoonfuls onto a greased cookie sheet. Bake at 350° 10 to 12 minutes until lightly browned. Cool on rack.

Whether the weather brings freeze or thaw, you can look ahead to hearty meals in January, February and March. Later on when balmy seasons arrive, you may anticipate lighter fare... Bon appetit.