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Fish For Feasting, Not Fasting

by Lydia Lovell

In the Lovell household the Lenten season was marked by more frequent use of fish but, as a youngster, I was unaware that eating less meat and more fish had any religious significance. Any kind of fish was a treat, not a sacrifice, and when fish was served twice a week, on Tuesdays as well as on Fridays, I felt twice blessed. The season had something to do with the practice, I realized, but not that we were fasting rather than feasting.

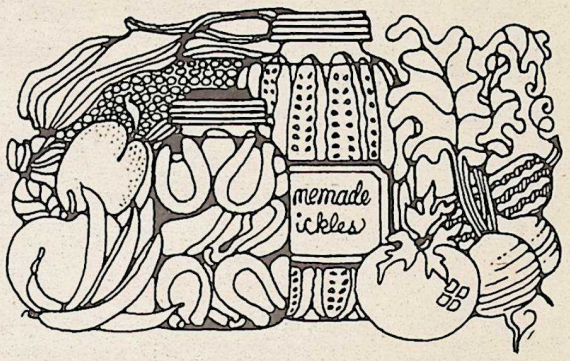
April marked the last month of spring in which we ate oysters, for from May through August we observed the restriction against eating that succulent bivalve during months not containing an R. Eating a couple of big bowls of Aunt Olivia's **Oyster Stew** never made any of us feel deprived, nor will you if you use either of her recipes. The first is the more traditional; it makes enough for one meal for two or three people; the second recipe yields enough for four, assuming in both instances that everyone will want second helpings.

1 pt. shucked oysters	**1-1/2 t. salt**
1/2 stick butter	**1/8 t. pepper**
1 qt. milk	**Paprika**

Drain oysters, reserving liquor. With your fingers, carefully remove any remaining bits of shell from oysters. In a deep heavy saucepan melt butter. Add oysters and liquor and cook 3 minutes over low heat until edges of oysters begin to curl. Add milk, salt, and pepper. Heat thoroughly, but do not boil. Ladle into bowls and sprinkle with paprika. Keep hot for second helpings. Do not allow to boil.

For heartier Oyster Stew, saute until tender and golden 1/2 C. chopped onions and 1/2 C. sliced celery in half-a-stick of butter. Add oysters and liquor and cook for 3 minutes. Pour in a quart of milk. Stir in 1 C. diced, boiled potatoes and an 8-oz. can of undrained whole-kernel corn. Heat thoroughly but do not allow to boil. Season to taste with salt and pepper; garnish with paprika.

Flounder is a flat fish that spends most of its life hiding under a thin layer of sand on the bottom of the sea. It moves only when hungry and something good to eat comes along, or if it is frightened. Because a flounder doesn't work very hard or build much muscle, its meat is fine-grained and delicate. Some folks call a flounder "sole" (perhaps because its shape resembles a shoe sole); in fancy restaurants you'll see Filet of Sole done up with almonds and sauces, but when Aunt Olivia ordered this fish, she told the fishman she wanted some "slivers" (rhymes with divers), and he skinned and boned a few flounder for her. If the slivers were good-sized, six filets were enough for four of us and Aunt Olivia made **Stuffed Flounder**.



6 flounder fillets (1-1/2 lbs.)	**1 egg**
2 T. margarine	**2 T. milk**
1 C. finely chopped onions	**1 C. crushed saltines**
1/4 t. dill weed	**1 T. butter**

Chop the two smallest fillets into fine dice. Saute the onions in melted margarine until soft. Add the chopped fish and cook over low heat, stirring, for 3 minutes. Remove from fire. In a small bowl, stir beaten egg together with 2 T. milk and 1/4 t. dill weed. Add cracker crumbs and mix well. Combine the two mixtures. Set aside. Line a small baking pan with aluminum foil. Place the two largest fillets in the pan and spread stuffing over each one. Top with the remaining two fillets. Scatter a smidgeon of dill weed over each remaining fillet and dot with butter. Bake 20 minutes at 425°; baste with pan juices after 10 minutes. Fish is done when it flakes easily with fork.

For those who like mackerel there's no better fish dinner, but not everyone appreciates its strong flavor and rich, oily meat. One whole **Baked Stuffed Tinker Mackerel** made a square meal for almost any man, woman, or healthy child in the Lovell family. for those less enthusiastic about mackerel, half-a-one was enough.

Aunt Olivia asked the fishman to scale the fish, remove its head, tail, and fin bones, and to gut it, leaving its backbone in place. The fishman, an old-timer who had been bringing fish to Aunt Olivia almost as long as she had been cooking, knew precisely how she wanted fish cleaned and that's the way he fixed it for her.

In a large skillet, Aunt Olivia sauteed 1/2 C. each of chopped onions and chopped celery until golden in 2 T. butter. While onions and celery cooked over low heat, she and I broke 4 or 5 slices of day-old white bread into crumbs. To the skillet were added 1 t. salt, 1/4 t. pepper, 1/4 t. dry mustard, and 1/2 t. poultry seasoning. Then we stirred in the bread crumbs and removed the pan from the stove. In a bowl large enough to hold all the stuffing, Aunt Olivia broke an egg and beat it with a fork until frothy. Then she added the seasoned crumbs and just enough boiling water to hold the mixture together. Into the fishes' cavities she packed enough stuffing to restore their natural contours. The mackerel were placed in a shallow baking pan... I line mine with foil... and baked half-an hour in a 375° oven. If you enjoy eating mackerel, you can't describe sitting down to that meal as a sacrifice.

Haddock, cod, and scrod are lean fish, preferred by some people to mackerel, striped bass, or bluefish. While members of the Lovell family considered fish of any description a treat, Aunt Olivia handled the more delicately flavored lean fishes with a fine hand. For each serving, she allowed half-a-pound of fish when preparing **Baked Haddock**.

2 lb. filleted haddock	**2 t. dried tarragon leaves**
juice of one lemon	**1/4 C. Parmesan cheese**
2 T. chopped parsley	

Arrange haddock fillets in a shallow baking dish lined with foil. Pour lemon juice over and around fish. Sprinkle with parsley and tarragon. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate about two hours. An hour before planning to serve, remove fish from refrigerator and baste fillets with pan juices. Dust surface of fish with grated Parmesan. Allow to come to room temperature while rest of meal is being prepared. Fifteen minutes before serving, slide baking pan containing fish into a hot 400° oven. Fish is cooked when it flakes with a fork. Do not overcook. Serve immediately.

The Lenten season is the ideal time of year to serve fish because fresh spring vegetables are coming into the market and nothing tastes better with fish than tender-crisp fresh asparagus spears, simmered in lightly salted water for 20 minutes. Bibb lettuce, washed and carefully dried, forms a perfect bed for quartered, ripe tomatoes dressed with **Lemon Mayonnaise**.

1 C. mayonnaise	**1/2 t. black pepper**
1/2 C. lemon juice	**1/2 t. celery seed**

Combine ingredients in a small bowl, stirring until smooth. Serve with lettuce and tomatoe salad. Dressing keeps well, refrigerated, in a capped jar or sealed plastic bowl.

With oily fish like mackerel, the Lovells preferred baked potatoes, but with leaner fish a casserole of **Brown Rice** provided a texture-taste treat.

In a small saucepan, saute a fine-chopped medium onion in 2 T. butter until golden brown. Stir in 2/3 C. raw brown rice, making sure each kernel is well-coated. Stir in 3 T. finely chopped fresh parsley and 2 C. boiling water. Transfer to a casserole; cover closely; bake in preheated 400° oven for an hour or until rice has absorbed all liquid. Fluff with fork.

Dessert? A quickie. Heap into a ready-baked graham cracker crust a mixture of 1 8-oz. pkg. of cream cheese, softened, and 1 pkg. lemon pudding mix. Refrigerate overnight. Can be frozen. Can be topped with whipped cream or topping. Delicious plain.

Bon appetit.