

Consuming Passions

**Eating and Drinking
Traditions
in
Ontario**



**The Ontario Historical Society
5151 Yonge Street
Willowdale, Ontario
M2N 5P5**

Consuming Passions

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of
The Ontario Historical Society
at the
Radisson Hotel
Ottawa, Ontario

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The Ontario Historical Society



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Introduction

Dorothy Duncan

Glenn J Lockwood

The Ontario Historical Society hosted the Conference "Consuming Passions: Eating and Drinking Traditions in Ontario" at the Radisson Hotel in Ottawa, May 4, 5, 6, 1989. This Conference, marking the 101st anniversary of the founding of The Ontario Historical Society, drew a large and enthusiastic audience, not only from Ontario, but from across Canada as well.

The Conference began with a workshop on researching and interpreting the food traditions of the fur traders and the military. The formal presentations moved along a historical path - from First Nations, to pioneer settlers, to Victorian excesses and right into the 20th century. Newcomers to Ontario and their contributions to Ontario's foodways were also explored and the Conference culminated in a presentation that focused on the challenge of the future - eating in space.

The Conference included many outstanding events - visits to local historic sites with tours that complemented the theme of food and beverages, a wine tasting party, a Temperance Meeting and a Victorian Supper Party. The foods and beverages served at the Conference highlighted the historical period under discussion - from wild mint tea to canned pop, and from pemmican and smoked fish to a fast food snack.

The Ontario Historical Society is grateful for the support and co-operation of the Radisson Hotel in Ottawa, and particularly to Executive Chef, Frits Marcehal, to the many donors listed in this book for their contributions, to the speakers who provided their papers for publication, and to the Ministry of Culture and Communications, The Honourable Christine E. Hart, Minister.

Dorothy Duncan
Glenn J Lockwood

Researching and Interpreting Ontario's Food Traditions

Fur Trader's Fare

Dorothy Duncan

The food and beverages that fuelled the men and women involved in the lucrative Canadian fur trade is a very complex subject and varied as dramatically as the great commercial enterprise itself. This very brief introduction will focus on the North West Company and its operation that included the First Nations, French Canadian canoemen and canny Scottish merchants. These unlikely allies formed themselves into a hard driving team with far flung outposts and an intricate organization to overcome the size and challenges of this continent and its wildly fluctuating seasons. As we will see, the success of this undertaking was as dependant on food and beverages, as a modern airplane is on gasoline. Because of the short Canadian summer, an inland headquarters was chosen, first at Grand Portage and later at Fort William (present day Thunder Bay), where a Rendezvous was held every July. This allowed time for the partners from Montreal to bring the trade goods to the headquarters in their huge Montreal canoes as soon as the ice was out of the rivers. In the meantime, the inland trappers and traders started from the western reaches of the continent as soon as the ice was out of the rivers there. Both groups planned to rendezvous at the inland headquarters in July to exchange the furs for the trade goods. As soon as their business was completed, both groups started for home so that they would not be caught in the frozen waterways before reaching their destinations.

A report to General George Haldimand, in 1784 gives us a graphic description of how this intricate organization worked:

The Inland Navigation from Montreal, by which the North-West business is carried on, is perhaps the most extensive of any in the known World, but is only practicable for Canoes on account of the great number of Carrying places. To give your Excellency some Ideas of which, there are upwards of ninety from Montreal to

Lake du Bois only, and many of them very long ones.

Two sets of men are employed in this business, making together upwards of 500; one half of which are occupied in the transport of Goods from Montreal to the Grand Portage, in Canoes of about Four Tons Burthen, Navigated by 8 to 10 men, and the other half are employed to take such goods forward to every Post in the interior Country to the extent of 1,000 and 2,000 miles and upwards, from Lake Superior, in Canoes of about one and a-half Ton Burthen, made expressly for the inland service, and navigated by 4 to 5 men only, according to the places of their destination.

The large Canoes from Montreal always set off early in May, and as the Provisions they take with them are consumed by the time they reach Michilimakinac, they are necessitated to call there, merely to take in an additional supply, not only for themselves but also for the use of the Canoes intended for the Interior Country and the Consumption of their servants at the Grand Portage, but as these Canoes are not capable of carrying the whole of such Provisions it thence becomes necessary to have a vessel or Boats upon Lake Superior for that transport only, and the utmost dispatch is required that everything may be ready in point of time to send off their supplies for the Interior Country, for which purpose the Goods, Provisions, and everything else required for the Outfits of the year, must be at the Grand Portage early in July; for the carrying place being at least ten Miles in length, Fifteen days are commonly spent in this service, which is performed by the Canoemen, who usually leave the west and from the 15th July to the 1st August, according to the distance of the places they are intended for.

Their general loading is two-thirds Goods and one-third Provisions, which not being sufficient for their subsistence until they reach winter Quarters, they must and always do, depend on the Natives they occasionally meet on the Road for an Additional Supply; and when this fails which is sometimes the case they are exposed to every misery that it is possible to survive, and equally so in returning from the Interior Country, as in the Spring provisions are generally more scanty. In the winter Quarters, however, they are at ease, and commonly in plenty, which only can reconcile them to that manner of life, and make them forget their sufferings in their Annual Voyage to and from the Grand Portage.¹