

## FOOD HISTORY NEWS

from Sandra L Oliver

Patricia Gibbs at Colonial Williamsburg Foundation suggested that I send you a copy of my publication 'Food History News.' She thought perhaps you would be interested in knowing of its existence.

This is a very new effort, begun June 1989, and I have printed only three issues so far. I have been pleased with the response, and have enough subscribers to oblige me to continue the project. The audience is primarily outdoor history museum foodways programs (such as the one at Williamsburg and many other agricultural and house museums across the USA and Canada). But I think that many food and culinary historians have found, or will find, it interesting, even though it is not written with a strong academic slant.

The purpose of FHN was to try to bridge the gap between the serious study of food history the day-to-day practitioners of historical cooking. I think what happens in many instances, is that historical food, gastronomy, culinary methods, etc, are studied and published about, but perhaps not always tested out in an experimental archaeological fashion. Or historical cooking is done day-to-day in many recreated sites based on the flimsiest sort of research, interpreted with fairly appalling generalisations or even blatant errors. The majority of historical sites in the States do not have fine research departments like the one Pat Gibbs is a part of at Colonial Williamsburg. And even when good research is available, food history is not always taken seriously enough to ensure that its interpretation is accurate.

I have been working in food history for about fifteen years, and have, through my association with Mystic Seaport Museum in Connecticut, developed a sort of specialization in food at sea on merchant, whaling, and fishing vessels. I have also developed a structural approach to foodways which is helpful in recreating past foodways, especially vernacular dishes and meals. (I met Pat when I presented this approach to the Foodways Committee at CW.) My approach informs the 'Joy of Historical Cooking' column in FHN, but so far I have not published my theory or method.

My address is: Food History News, HCR 81 Box 354A, Islesboro ME 04848, USA.

[This publication (8 pages, American A4 equivalent), of which we have seen the first three issues, strikes a refreshingly new note. It includes notice of coming events, and a Whatzit column for queries about puzzling items. Subscription rates are given as US\$8.00 for an individual (\$10.00 for an institution) for a one-year subscription (four issues). No overseas rates are shown, and we suggest that subscribers from outside the USA add a dollar for additional postage or, if they wish to receive it air mail, enquire about the cost. Ed]