CHoW is the Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C., an informal, nonprofit, educational organization dedicated to the study of the history of foodstuffs, cuisines, and culinary customs, both historical and contemporary, from all parts of the world.

Since 1996, with speakers, on field trips, and at special events, CHoW has travelled the Silk Road, dined with kings and presidents, and learned how food has changed through ancient techniques and modern industrialization.

Join CHoW and learn the real meaning of what’s for dinner.
What is culinary history anyway?
It could be what you had for dinner last night...
Or that mysterious jar in the back of your fridge

Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C.
Culinary history is a way to study cultures and people—past and present—using *foodways* as a framework.
Exploring the sources and speed of changes in agriculture...
markets

Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C.
tools

Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C.
technology

Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C.
industry
fashion

Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C.
Culinary history often reveals the things we share...
and the things that set us apart

Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C.
It is a way to understand cultures by reading cookbooks as cultural artifacts or recreating historic cookery.
CHoW has been featured in *Cooking Light* magazine, *Bethesda Magazine*...

**Hungry for History**

At the local culinary society **CHoW**, members indulge a taste for the past

By Nevin Martell | Photos by Chris Rossi

Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C.
An Extra Helping Of History

A D.C. club bites into the culinary past via old-time recipes and new-filled meet-ups

Then and Chow
At the December meeting of the Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C., members started their gathering in the usual way — by engaging in culinary show-and-tell. Congregating in the decidedly unaproning surroundings of a government conference room in Bethesda, the cadre of chefs, foodies and history buffs passed around what seemed to be the tiny stone club of some bloodthirsty pygmies and a small, white, plastic device that resembled those three-legged alien spacecrafts in “War of the Worlds.”

After lots of exclamations of “What they heck!” and handling of the oddities, club vice president Gigi Williamson, 66, a writer from McLean, Va., revealed that the club had been using in Micronesia to pulverize breadfruit, and that the UFO was actually a hard-boiled egg peeler from the 1960s. “That looks like more trouble than it’s worth,” Williamson said as she passed the egg peeler back to its owner.

History may be written by the winners, but it’s what denizens of past decades had for dinners that concerns the Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C. (ChW/DC for short). For its years, the group has met monthly to hear speakers, compare old recipes and, of course, eat a combo of retro foods and modern dishes. “Having a bite gets people talking,” said Shirley Sherasky, 63, a retired sociology professor who is the group’s founder.

At the December meeting, folks snacked on candied pumpkin slices inspired by ancient Mexican customs, corn bread made from one member’s old-family recipe and Southern-style hummus made from Med-eyed peas.

Once a year, the group gets together for a history-themed dinner. The last feast starred Native American dishes such as brown stew, cactus salad and cornmeal hoesakes with prickle-pear syrup.

But it’s the lively appetite for knowledge that really keeps members showing up. In December, Katie Leonard Turner, a visiting assistant professor of history at Philadelphia University, charted about turn-of-the-20th-century convenience foods, from the hot dogs that working-class Philly men enjoyed in saloons to the pre-made pastries (meat and vegetable-filled pastries not unlike empanadas) favored by stay-at-home moms.

“Food provides a window into what peoples’ day-to-day lives were like back then,” Turner said. Other talks have covered morsels from the invention of the hamburger (probably in the 1890s in the U.S., FYI) to the origins of cheap nixie (it, too, was created in the United States, not China, back at the end of the 19th century).

“The average American doesn’t know where their food comes from and the story behind it,” Williamson said. “But if you look back at history, you can find out how we got to where we are today.”

It’s no surprise that, as the Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C.
Our speakers are authors, scholars, chefs, museum curators, restaurateurs, journalists, and historians

William Woys Weaver, Joan Nathan
Monica Bhide, Leni Sorensen
Bee Wilson, Michael Krondl

Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C.
Our projects include developing CHoW’s Culinary History Collection of the Smithsonian Libraries
Our monthly newsletter, CHoWline, covers meetings and includes book reviews, local food events, travel stories, news of our members, and research tips.
Members share news, latest work, research findings, events information, and “whatzits”

top: cider cup holder, bag carrier, and ?
bottom: shrimp peeler

Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C.
Along with monthly speakers, we sponsor field trips, special events, and an annual cooperative supper on a historical theme.
Membership is open to anyone interested in learning about foodways, culinary history, and gastronomy. Everyone’s contribution is welcome, and we benefit from a wide variety of viewpoints on culinary history.

www.chowdc.org

Facebook: Culinary Historians of Washington, DC

Twitter: @thechowdc

Join us and explore your life and the world through the kitchen.