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Feasting on Broken Glass: Making a Meal of Seeds, Bones, and Sherds

Mary C. Beaudry

Drawing on various lines of evidence that provide insight into late 18th- and early 19th-century episodes of dining at the Spencer-Peirce-Little Farm in Newbury, Massachusetts, I explore ways in which historical archaeologists can move from discussions of food and foodstuffs to explore menus, meals, and dining. I argue that by drawing together many lines of evidence—food remains such as bones, seeds, and shells; documentary sources; and ceramics, glassware, and utensils—archaeologists are able to "feast" upon the evidence and to go beyond merely reporting on what people ate in the past. They do so by exploring ways of interpreting food on the plate, wine in the glass, and meals on the table. The goal is to present a framework through which we can investigate not so much nutrition or ingredients but the experience of dining in early America, in specific contexts in which meals played important roles in the negotiation of social positioning and identity.

En m'appuyant sur diverses données qui permettent de mieux comprendre les repas consommés à la fin du XVIIIe et au début du XIXe siècle à la ferme Spencer-Peirce-Little (Newbury, Massachusetts), j'explore les façons dont les archéologues historiques peuvent passer d'une discussion sur la nourriture et les denrées alimentaires vers une exploration des menus et des repas. Je propose qu'en rassemblant de nombreux éléments de preuves — des restes alimentaires, tels que des ossements, des graines, et des coquillages; des sources documentaires; et des céramiques, du verre, et des ustensiles — les archéologues sont capables de se « régaler » de données leur permettant d'aller au-delà de la simple énumération de ce que les gens mangeaient dans le passé. Ils le font en recherchant des moyens d'interpréter la nourriture dans l'assiette, le vin dans le verre, et les repas sur la table. L'objectif est de présenter un cadre grâce auquel nous pouvons étudier non pas seulement la nutrition ou les ingrédients, mais également l'expérience de manger pendant la période historique américaine, selon des contextes spécifiques parmi lesquels les repas ont joué un rôle important dans la négociation de la position sociale et de l'identité.

Introduction

Archaeological evidence for differing types of meals held in the late 18th century and early 19th century was excavated nearly two decades ago from two sealed features at the Spencer-Peirce-Little Farm in Newbury, Massachusetts, features on which I have published in considerable detail elsewhere, e.g., Beaudry (1995, 1998), including in a previous issue of this journal. There has been ample time, then, for analysis and interpretation of the many lines of evidence; I discuss the results of faunal and botanical analyses, as well as the artifactual evidence, in two recent articles (Beaudry 2008, 2010a). In both I took a rather broad-brush approach to evidence for food and dining, and, although I stated that the archaeological evidence pointed to social feasting, I did not address meals per se, or mealtimes and the experience of dining. Rather, I discussed food remains largely in isolation from the vessels and utensils used to consume food and drink.

In this essay, which is intended as an exploratory thought piece, rather than as a report on details already widely available through the aforementioned publications, I offer thoughts on how archaeologists can "feast on broken glass" (and on seeds, bones, sherds, and documentary evidence), as it were, by combining multiple lines of evidence that provide information about meals and mealtimes. I do not see this as a venue in which it is necessary for me to offer an overview of feasting studies, although I am fully aware that it is a topic widely and intensively explored by archaeologists (see, e.g., Wiessner and Schiefenhövel 1996, Dietler and Hayden 2001, Bray 2003, Jones 2007, Hayden and Villeneuve 2011, Fox 2012, Rødsrud 2012, and Whalen 2012). Here I address the evidence for grand meals at the Spencer-Peirce-Little Farm, acknowledging that I am embracing a contemporary definition of a "feast" as a grand and abundant meal (O'Connor 2014), but, in the examples I discuss, I am convinced that

the mealtimes in question were events for establishing mutual obligations centered around hospitality and, perhaps more important, were at times, at least, repasts and special occasions in service to sociality and prestige negotiation (cf. Beaudry 2008, 2013).

I recall quite vividly being struck by something that zooarchaeologist Joanne Bowen said in concluding a paper she gave at the 1987 Society for Historical Archaeology meetings, to the effect that "we need to get the food back on the plate" if archaeologists are to gain a true understanding of foodways. Others have said much the same thing over the years, so this notion is not original with me. It is a somewhat daunting challenge to attempt to go beyond the concrete evidence for food and dining in order to talk about the experience of dining, but it is worth thinking about ways of drawing together as many lines of evidence as possible toward an exploration of food on the plate, wine in the glass, and meals on the table. It is especially worth thinking about as far as meals and mealtimes are concerned, both because eating is an embodied act and the experience of eating is rarely perfunctory. Formal dinner parties and other feasts in particular are closely orchestrated theatrical events in which the diners' sensations and experiences are every bit as important as the nutritional content of what they consume (see, e.g., Dietler and Hayden 2001; Jones 2007). These are "total events" that engage all the senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, touch. Historians have not yet developed full-fledged history or histories of the senses, because they have tended to explore one or another sense in isolation from the others. Yet consideration of intersensorality—*synesthesia*—is critical if we are to comprehend how "the senses worked together and how people in the past understood their articulation" (Smith 2007: 118).

In many ways it is perfectly logical to think of meals and mealtimes in terms of the senses and to try to interpret archaeological remains with the senses in mind. Anthropologist David Sutton (2010: 213), in his review essay "Food and the Senses," notes that "even archaeologists, with much less data [than ethnographers] at hand, have begun to explore the sensory aspects of food"; he offers the examples of Hamilakis (1999), Joyce and Henderson (2008), and Outram (2007). Two recent volumes, Day's *Making Senses of the Past* (2013) and Hamilakis's *Archaeology and the Senses* (2013a), offer provocative and fascinating insight into the emergence and maturation of archaeologies of sensory experience.

Some might consider such an approach as straying too far into the realm of "empathy"—a criticism often made of phenomenological studies. Julian Thomas acknowledges that we can only know about past lives through the embodied experience of our own lives, but paraphrases German philosopher Gadamer in reminding us that our "own movement through a building or across a hillside is a way of opening a dialogue with a past cultural horizon, rather than imagining that we have entered into that horizon" (Thomas 2006: 33). My exploration of the experience of meals is not aimed at recapturing past sensibilities and subjectivities, but at bringing together different lines of evidence of the material practices around dining and the qualitative differences among types of meals. Although Sutton (2010: 220) states that explorations of the sensual aspects of food should contribute to understandings of "everyday life and the multiple contexts in which the culturally shaped sensory properties and sensory experiences of food are invested with meaning, emotion, memory, and value," his discussion of recent anthropological interest in the "materiality of food" makes it clear that scholars have focused largely on the food, giving scant attention to the material culture of cookery, dining, and drinking (for exceptions see Graff and Rodríguez-Alegría 2012; Smith 2008). Archaeologists may lack access to cultural informants, but they often work with objects that played roles in the overall synesthesia of the enjoyment of food and drink. It seems useful, therefore, for historical archaeologists to make full use of all the evidence that can be mustered in order to talk about food and mealtimes in ways that can address issues such as meaning, emotion, memory, and value.

I became interested in an "experiential" approach to interpreting the things we dig up that relate to food and drinking, while reading a master's thesis on the stemware found at 17th- and 18th-century sites in Boston, Massachusetts (Lentz 2008). I encouraged my student to move beyond description, classification, and

quantification of the objects to consider the wines and other beverages for which they were intended. Although we know well that people could use the objects for any purpose that suited them and could quaff any beverage they chose from any given glass, stemware is made in forms deemed best for particular wines. Sometimes the shape of the glass is designed to enhance particular properties of the wine; this is especially true for the broader categories of still, sparkling, and fortified wines.

We marvel at the elaborate delicacy of *façon de Venise* stemware, for instance, but archaeological examples of *façon de Venise* are likely to be treated as exotic and perhaps largely decorative items (Grulich 2004). Let us also consider such a glass, filled with ruby-red claret, held up by a diner at a table lit by flickering candlelight to admire its color and clarity before drinking it, then bringing a morsel of mouthwateringly succulent spit-roasted beef from a tin-glazed earthenware plate to his or her mouth on the tip of a bone-handled knife. Evocation of such scenarios is one of the main steps toward considering excavated food remains as elements of a meal. It may not be possible to develop a specific analytical protocol for the sort of interpretation I have in mind; interpretive archaeology in most instances involves burrowing into a topic and developing contexts for interpretation that are appropriate for a given situation or set of evidence (Wilkie 2009; Beaudry 2010b: 147–148; Beaudry and Symonds 2010: xiii–xiv).

Glass experts tend to categorize drinking glasses into fairly broad categories based on shape; Jones and Smith, in their monograph on glassware from British military sites in Canada, offer four categories of drinking glasses: tumblers, wines, firing glasses, and punch glasses and bowls. Under storage and serving vessels they also discuss wine-glass coolers and finger glasses, and treat various sorts of bottles, as well as decanters and carafes (Jones and Smith 1985: 25–57). Not surprisingly, these categories closely parallel the types of glass tableware discussed in the *Parks Canada Glass Glossary*, although the glossary places stemware in a special category that includes stemmed serving vessels along with drinking glasses (Jones and Sullivan 1989: 138–142). Jones and Sullivan state that the literature on 18th- and 19th-century glassware is replete with references to stemware "intended for specific beverages such as ale, champagne, claret, wine, gin, mead, and so on"; and while they note that "it is clear from contemporary literature that there were some differentiated stemware forms," they caution that "correlating stemware forms with specific types of drinking vessels and beverages consumed should be limited to what can be backed up with documentation" (1989: 42).

In his book *Early Post-Medieval Vessel Glass in England c. 1500–1670*, however, Hugh Willmott considers attitudes towards glass vessels (Willmott 2002: 26). He notes that some favored glass because of its aesthetic property of transparency, a quality that helped the vessel emphasize its contents, often rendering alcoholic beverages more appealing. While some contemporary observers saw drinking glasses as "instruments of drunkenness and depravity" (2002: 27), others remarked on the near-universal appeal of glass, not just among the nobility, but also among the middling sorts, as well as the poor. This is borne out by the archaeological evidence: "[G]lass of varying qualities appeared at a wide variety of social milieus for the first time in the late 16th and early 17th centuries" (2002: 27). The high frequency of glass in the archaeological record led Willmott to speculate that purchase of large numbers of glass vessels represented an extreme form of conspicuous consumption, because its fragility led to breakage and waste, and, unlike silver, gold, pewter, and other materials for which it often substituted, glass had no scrap value whatsoever (2002: 28). Rather, the fragile nature of glass was part of its appeal as an investment; hosts and hostesses could readily demonstrate to their guests "their appreciation of the fashions and tastes of the period" (2005: 141).

The point is to study objects as much to learn about practices, what people did with the items, how, and in what circumstances—and why and what it means that they did things the way they did—as about the demand/expenditure side of consumption (cf. Certeau, Giard, and Mayol 1998). Practices around cookery and dining, as well as those associated with activities, such as alcohol and tobacco consumption, personal hygiene, and the

presentation of self, involve not individual objects (or usually do not involve individual objects), but entire suites of objects. In archaeological parlance these might be called "sub-assemblages," stipulating not material or manufacture method, but items that are used together to carry out a particular practice or set of practices. To accomplish this, an investigator needs to work with *all* tobacco-related materials, for instance, when analyzing smoking and smoking-related behavior (e.g., Cook 1989), or all items associated with presentation of self (adornment, hygiene, makeup, hair care, etc.) when studying performance of identity (e.g., Johnson 2010). Objects used together for habitual and/or recurrent practices in combination create or recreate meaning, especially if objects are used together in culturally specific ways (see, e.g., Praetzellis and Praetzellis 2001). We need to view an archaeological collection not just in terms of what fits back together literally and can be mended and included in a vessel count, but also to discover what fits back together in terms of practices and to attempt to comprehend what the intended outcomes of various practices might have been. This requires considering more than just the individual artifact or artifact type used, but attempting to reconstruct, for want of a better phrase, "assemblages of practice," or perhaps, "ensembles of practice." Willmott (2005: 129) expresses it very well:

> Ideally all aspects of dining culture should be examined together, so that we can begin to understand these meanings and metaphors. The lack of archaeological survival of many elements, both material and cultural, coupled with necessities of specialized artefact study makes this a difficult aim to accomplish.

The examples I discuss below illustrate quite clearly how variables in site-formation processes, preservation, and availability of data hamper the effort to bring all lines of potential evidence to bear upon the interpretation of materials from any given deposit. Most important in the present exercise is the need to combine the results of analysis of food remains like seeds and bones with the results of one's analysis of the ceramics and glassware—if it can be done. This involves going beyond counts and percentages of seeds, bones, sherds, and glass fragments to consider the ways in which the lines of evidence can be conceptually combined; this is something that archaeologists are undertaking with increasing regularity (see, e.g., VanDerwarker and Peres 2010). Using documentary and secondary evidence, as well as insights gained through the efforts of people who prepare and cook food using period gear and foodstuffs, can help enliven interpretations by providing a form of ethnographic analogy of the sensory aspects of sitting down to a meal.

The Spencer-Peirce-Little Farm

The Spencer-Peirce-Little Farm in Newbury, Massachusetts, was occupied from 1630 until well into the 1990s by a succession of owners, some of them absentee, and is currently owned by Historic New England and operated as an historic site and family-friendly farm and petting zoo. The stone-and-brick house that survives on the property has recently been dated by dendrochronology to ca. 1690, confirming that it was built by the second generation of Peirces to occupy the property. I conducted archaeology at this site in campaigns of various lengths over the course of nearly two decades, from 1986 through 2004. Of interest for present purposes are two phases of occupation of the site by prominent Newburyport merchants Nathaniel Tracy, ca. 1778–1795, and Offin Boardman, ca. 1797–1811. Rather than repeat details about either of these two men and their families that have been published elsewhere (Beaudry 2008, 2010a; see Beaudry 1995 for discussion of the excavations), I will move on quickly to describe the sealed features that have with confidence been associated with their successive ownership and occupation of the farm.

A Late 18th-Century Feast?

Nathaniel Tracy acquired the farm in 1778 and moved there sometime after that with his wife and their many children; when he bought the property he added it to the long list of many grand houses he owned. Excavations beneath the floor of the kitchen resulted in the discovery of a filled-in stairwell along the north edge of the central chimney stack (Beaudry 1992). Artifacts from the fill provide a *terminus post quem* of ca. 1780 (Scarlett 1992); various lines of evidence (pollen, faunal, documentary) point to the spring of 1778 or 1779 for the filling episode. The stairwell

cavity had been filled with demolition debris generated from remodeling the chimney and with kitchen waste, including numerous animal bones (TAB. 1) and charred seeds (TAB. 2). It seems as though cooking activities that generated a great deal of distinctive food waste took place even in the midst of renovations undertaken as part of the remodeling. There was very strong evidence for preparation of a fine feast that may have consisted of pigeon pie and roast suckling pig (Landon 1992). The plant remains from the stairwell deposit included domesticates such as corn, wheat, and squash, with charred corn kernels found in every level of the stairwell fill. Most of the other plants can grow in the wild, "either because they are native plants (such as blueberry), or they grow successfully as escapees from cultivation (peach and raspberry, for instance)" (Pendleton 1990: 69). Charred kernels (n=1,235) and cob fragments (n=25) of eight-rowed New England flint corn were the most abundant of plant remains in the deposit; there are nearly endless uses for corn as food for both humans and livestock, and corn was very much a staple food. Pendleton (1990: 57) notes that "much corn was consumed fresh in its milky state, but most corn was parched by roasting or smoking it in the husk" before being stored. She posits an unintentional charring incident that rendered the corn inedible (Pendleton 1990: 59), leading to its disposal. If cooked and eaten, corn kernels would not find their way into the archaeological record except as food waste or in fecal material, but here the presence of charred corn kernels suggests that corn was not just grown and processed at the farm, but incorporated into the diet in various ways. Cookery books list many dishes made with corn or cornmeal; it seems likely that at this time most corn would have been consumed as meal, "cooked or baked into cornmeal mush or hasty pudding, johnny-cake or hoe cake, and 'Boston' brown bread"; if served fresh it could have been added to succotash or bean porridge (Pendleton 1990: 60).

Unfortunately this deposit produced little in the way of ceramic tablewares and glasswares, nor have other deposits relating to the Tracy family occupation of the site been found. Figure 1 shows a Chinese porcelain plate that, in quality, is consistent with the household furnishings listed in Nathanial Tracy's probate inventory (Dempsey 1993a); one is tempted to speculate that he could well have owned a Chinese Imari dinner service, although nothing identifiable as such is listed in the inventory. The plate in Figure 1 was found at Spencer-Peirce-Little in the lowest layer of a privy, Feature 6, discussed below, but it is one of two "outliers" from the early to mid-18th century found in a deposit containing mostly items dating to the early 19th century; it could have been among accumulated rubbish left behind by the Tracys or an heirloom piece owned by the Boardmans (FIG. 1). It is illustrated here as an example of high-quality Chinese porcelain typical of what would have been owned by successful merchants during and after the American Revolution.

Tracy's probate inventory, recorded on 30 September 1796, provides no details of ceramic, glass, or metal vessels associated with food preparation or serving (Essex County Registry of Probate 1796). Table 3 extracts from the full probate inventory only the entries listing items of material culture associated

Figure 1. This Chinese Imari porcelain plate, recovered from an early 19th-century privy deposit at the Spencer-Peirce-Little site, is the quality of tableware one would have expected the Tracys to have owned. The plate and a Batavia-porcelain tea bowl are unique finds predating the other tea- and tablewares in this deposit by several decades, but cannot be directly linked to the Tracy occupation of the site. (Photo by Michael Hamilton.)

Table 1. Taxonomic representation of faunal remains recovered from the kitchen stairwell.

Taxonomic identification	**TNF**	**% TNF**	**WT**	**% WT**	**MNI**	**% MNI**
Bos taurus (cow)	82	2.5	2226.7	40.2	2	2.7
Ovis aries/Capra hircus (sheep/goat)	34	1.0	193.3	3.5	2	2.7
Ovis aries (sheep)	[6]	0.2	[50.9]	0.9	—	—
Ovis/Capra/Odocoileus (sheep/goat/deer)	3	0.1	10.2	0.2	—	—
Sus scrofa (pig)	168	5.1	803.9	14.5	6	8.1
Felix domesticus (cat)	1	*	1.2	*	1	1.4
Mephitis mephitis (striped skunk)	1	*	1.5	*	1	1.4
Procyon lotor (raccoon)	1	*	9.4	0.2	1	1.4
Mus musculus (house mouse)	9	0.3	0.9	—	2	2.7
Rattus sp. (rat)	66	2.0	14.9	0.3	11	14.9
Rattus norvegicus (Norway rat)	[20]	0.6	[7.0]	0.1	—	—
Sciurus carolinensis (eastern gray squirrel)	7	0.2	3.8	0.1	1	1.4
Marmota monax (woodchuck)	5	0.2	3.9	0.1	1	1.4
Rodentia (rodent)	6	0.2	0.9	—	—	—
Small mammal	35	1.1	3.9	0.1	—	—
Small-medium mammal	10	0.3	3.8	0.1	—	—
Medium mammal	239	7.2	395.9	7.1	—	—
Medium-large mammal	33	1.0	116.5	2.1	—	—
Large mammal	59	1.8	696.9	12.6	—	—
Unidentified mammal	301	9.2	279.4	5.0	—	—
Cyanocitta cristata (bluejay)	4	0.1	0.5	*	1	1.4
cf. *Turdus migratorius* (probable robin)	1	*	0.1	*	1	1.4
Passeriformes (perching birds)	5	0.2	0.5	*	1	1.4
Columbidae (passenger pigeon/rock dove)	96	2.9	17.6	0.3	8	10.8
cf. *Sterna* sp. (probable tern)	2	0.1	0.3	*	1	1.4
Charadriidae (plovers)	3	0.2	0.3	*	2	2.7
Meleagris gallopavo (turkey)	35	1.1	53.2	1.0	5	6.8
Gallus gallus (chicken)	45	1.4	53.9	1.0	6	8.1
Phasianidae	2	0.1	0.9	*	—	—
Galliformes	1	*	0.1	*	—	—
Aix sponsa (wood duck)	2	0.1	0.8	*	1	1.4
Anas crecca/discors (teal)	3	0.2	1.4	*	1	1.4
Anas sp. (duck)	15	0.4	17.9	0.3	2	2.7
Branta canadensis (Canada goose)	28	0.8	62.8	1.1	5	6.8
Anatidae (swans, geese, and ducks)	3	0.1	4.2	0.1	—	—
cf. *Phalacrocorax* sp. (probably cormorant)	1	*	1.2	*	1	1.4
Unidentified bird	553	16.8	116.2	2.1	—	—

Table 1. Taxonomic representation of faunal remains recovered from the kitchen stairwell. (*continued*)

Taxonomic identification	**TNF**	**% TNF**	**WT**	**% WT**	**MNI**	**% MNI**
Rana sp. (frog)	3	0.1	0.3	*	1	1.4
Salienta (small frog or toad)	4	0.1	0.4	*	1	1.4
cf. Mugilidae (probable mullet)	2	0.1	0.2	*	1	1.4
cf. *Micropterus* sp. (prob. freshwater bass)	2	0.1	0.2	*	1	1.4
Roccus saxatilis (striped bass)	1	*	0.2	*	1	1.4
Percoidea (small perch, sunfish, or bass)	1	*	0.2	*	1	1.4
Gadus morhua (cod)	10	0.3	20.2	0.4	2	2.7
Melanogrammus aeglefinus (haddock)	2	0.1	7.9	0.1	1	1.4
Gadidae (cods, hakes, and haddocks)	14	0.4	5.7	0.1	—	—
Acipenser sp. (sturgeon)	9	0.3	15.2	0.2	1	1.4
Unidentified fish	639	19.5	109.4	2.0	—	—
Homarus americanus (lobster)	1	*	0.6	*	1	—
Crassostrea virginica (eastern oyster)	32	1.0	26.3	0.5	—	—
Spisula sp. (surf clam)	9	0.3	63.6	1.1	—	—
Mya arenaria (soft shell clam)	15	0.4	32.9	0.6	—	—
Geukensia demissa (Atlantic ribbed mussel)	1	*	0.1	*	—	—
Mytilus edulis (blue mussel)	19	0.6	2.0	*	—	—
Mytilidae (mussels)	2	0.1	0.2	*	—	—
Mercenaria mercenaria (northern quahog)	9	0.3	25.2	0.4	—	—
Bivalvia (bivalves)	110	3.3	36.3	0.7	—	—
Gastropoda (gastropods)	1	*	0.1	*	—	—
Mollusca (mollusks)	16	0.5	6.0	0.1	—	—
Unidentified bone	523	16.0	81.1	1.5	—	—
Total	3,284	100.0	5,533.1	99.7	74	99.7

TNF = total number of fragments; WT = weight in grams; MNI = minimum number of individuals
* <0.1
Numbers in brackets [£] are subsets of a preceeding category.
Source: Landon 1992.

with dining. It should be noted that the inventory takers constructed their list in a particular manner that places items into what they clearly perceived as appropriate categories (beds and bedding, other linen, furniture and furnishings, etc.); it is not a room-by-room inventory, in other words. Most valuable among the material culture of dining are the damask "table cloths"; there are 12 table cloths in all, along with 12 napkins, revealing that the household was well provided with high-quality napery. It is possible that the 16 mahogany chairs and the "5 foot" mahogany table were placed in the dining room, though if the modifier "5 foot" refers to the length of the table, it is fairly short for a dining table (although it is the longest table listed); it may have had leaves that extended it, but table leaves are not mentioned. Serving and dining items are listed as "22 Oz of Silver" (probably silver flatware such as spoons, forks, and knives), "Silver plated Ware," "Glass Ware," and "Crockery Ware," providing no clues as to vessel forms; also listed are a dozen each of knives and forks valued at $22.25—more than the "silver," suggesting they were particularly

Table 2. Identified plant remains from the kitchen stairwell deposit at the Spencer-Peirce-Little Farm.

			Uses			
Latin name	**Common name**	**# Seeds**	**Food**	**Medicine**	**Non-food**	**Other**
Bouteloua sp.	grama-grass	1	—	—	x	—
Carya sp.	hickory	1	x	—	—	lumber, fuel, fish poison
Chenopodium/ Amaranthus sp.	goosefoot, lamb's quarters, pigweed	39	x	—	—	—
Curcurbita cf.	pumpkin, squash	14	x	x	—	domesticate
pepo Geranium cf. *carolinianum*	Carolina geranium	3	—	—	x	—
Melilotus sp.	sweet clover, melilot	1	x	x	—	sachet, tobacco additive, livestock forage
Paspalum sp.	paspalum	1	—	—	x	—
Polygonum sp.	smartweed, knotweed	1	x	—	—	—
Portulaca oleracea	purslane	2	x	x	—	—
Prunus sp.	cherry, peach	3	x	x	—	lumber
Rhus cf. *glabra*	smooth sumac	1	x	x	—	dye, tannin
Rubus sp.	raspberry, blackberry	2	x	x	—	—
Rumex cf. *acetosella*	sheep sorrel	1	x	x	—	—
Sambucus sp.	elderberry	6	x	x	—	dye
Trifolium cf. *repens*	white clover	1	x	x	—	same as sweet clover
Triticum sp.	wheat	1	x	—	—	domesticate
Vaccinium sp.	blueberry	1	x	—	—	dye
Zea mays	maize	1,235	x	x	—	domesticate; all kernels charred; +28 cob frags.
Source: Pendleton 1990.						

fine. We recovered from excavations in front of the house a single example of a blue-and-white tin-glazed earthenware pistol-grip handle from either a knife or a fork, and restoration carpenters found in crawlspaces of the house a late 18th-century knife and two-tined fork with bone pistol-grip handles (gnaw marks on the bone handles indicate the items were likely purloined by the house's large commensal population of rodents); either or both of these styles of cutlery could have been owned or used by the Tracys. "Silver plated Ware" could have been silver flatware, such as platters or salvers or other vessels, as opposed to actual silver plate, which was not common before the second quarter of the 19th century.

There is a written account that describes Tracy as a person who hosted elaborate dinner parties, and recounts a story of one banquet, in particular, in which the party was made up of the members of a visiting French squadron (Winsor 1881). All-male dinner parties were not unusual among elites at this time. Such events allowed an ambitious host to impress and to form important bonds; commerce prospered through commensality, so long as the staging and enactment of the feast were successful (Garrett 1990: 81 illustrates this using Henry Sargent's ca. 1821 painting *The Dinner Party*). It is not known who was invited to partake of roast suckling pig and pigeon pie at the Tracys in the spring of 1778 or 1779, but the evidence

Table 3. Dining material culture and possible foodstuffs listed in Nathaniel Tracy's probate inventory, 1796.

Item	Value in dollars
10 damask table cloths	30.00
two diaper table cloths	3.00
12 napkins	4.00
16 Mahogany chairs	20.00
1 Mahogany 5 foot table [dining table?]	10.00
one large case and 5 bottles	6.00
1 tea table	4.00
silver plated ware	9.00
glass ware	6.00
crockery ware	10.00
five waiters [serving trays]	1.25
one dozen of knives and forks	22.25
Comestibles listed as produce: 35 bushels of Indian corn	30.00
one barrel & a half of pork	24.00
six barrels of cider	39.00
20 bushels of potatoes	5.00
Source: Essex County Registry of Probate (1796).	

at hand suggests Tracy hosted a true feast on a well-furnished table set with elaborately prepared dishes, placed by servants who brought forth the food on trays with flourish and panache.

I have encountered no archaeological or documentary evidence of elaborate meals held after Tracy lost his fortune through ill-favored business deals after the Revolution and retired to the farm. Two visitors remarked on the austerity of the household. J. P. Brissot de Warville (1964: 364) and a colleague came to dinner at the farm in 1788 and commented on Tracy's sad financial circumstances, saying that he "stoically bears his misfortunes, comforted and sustained by his good wife." Evidently the dinner itself was not noteworthy. A local woman, Alice Tucker, called upon Mrs. Tracy on two occasions. On the first visit on 20 October 1789, Tucker found Mrs. Tracy seated at "her tea table with her children about her" and remarked on how well she kept up her dignity. On 13 December 1790, Tucker again took tea, but found that "[o]ur repast was slender; two cups of tea, and one small piece of biscuit" (Tucker 1789–1790). The three men who prepared the inventory of Tracy's estate referred to a few items as "old," but the general impression is that the Tracys had filled the house with an abundance of mahogany furniture (chairs, tables, bureaus, desks, bookcases, chests, chests of draws, etc.), at least six looking glasses, floor carpets, brass candelabra, and other refinements. The documentary record reveals that in retirement the Tracys continued to extend hospitality on a limited basis, and that their visitors were more struck by the couple's reduced circumstances than by the food or drink their hosts were able to offer.

Early 19th-Century Grand Meals at Spencer-Peirce-Little

Excavation in 1992 of a privy filled with household rubbish linked to the time of Offin Boardman's ownership and occupation of the property produced ample evidence of many episodes of entertaining and grand dinner parties (FIG. 2). Here were over 100 dinner plates, many serving dishes, tumblers, stemware, and wine and liquor bottles, as well as condiment bottles (Beaudry 2010a). This deposit also produced a good deal of botanical evidence, but little in the way of food bone. There were several vertebrae of a mature, ocean-going shark, but it seems unlikely the shark was eaten as food (David B. Landon 2011, pers. comm.). The evidence for what the Boardmans served their guests comes from entries in Offin Boardman's farm diary (Dempsey 1993b). Among entries dating between 22 October 1799 and 5 May 1810, Boardman mentions many meals at which company was present, including "Breakfarst" (three times) and "Supper" (once, with 80 guests present), "Dinner" (12 times), and "Tea" (18 times), but mentions food served at only five of the dinner parties. These five entries refer to the meat portion of the meal: roast mutton, pig, "A fine turkey," "Pig & Leg Veal," and "pig."

It has been said that "the story of meat in New England was a story of pork and beef" (Stavely and Fitzgerald 2004: 173), but Boardman does not mention beef, per se, apart from the veal, which was served in August; the fine turkey formed the main course at a small family dinner party in June 1809, so was

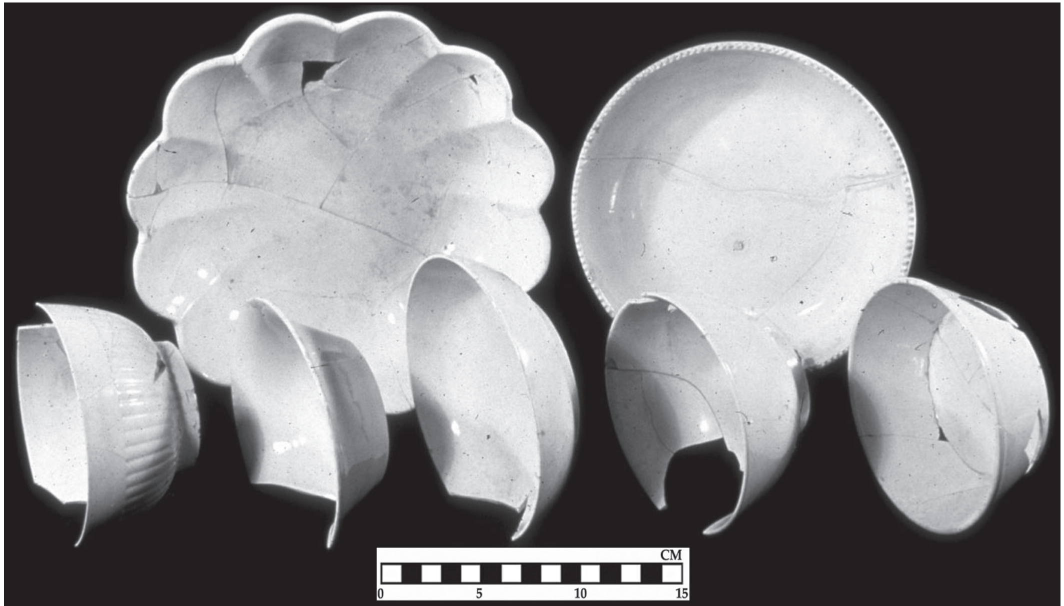

Figure 2. Creamware serving and punch bowls likely used by the Boardmans in serving their guests; dozens of creamware plates were also found. (Photo by Michael Hamilton.)

not part of a Thanksgiving feast (Oliver 1995: 242–243; Baker 2009). The "Mutton Rosted" was served with "Pudins," which could have been baked, steamed, or boiled, sweet or savory (Lucraft 2007; Mason 2007). Perhaps traditional New England Indian pudding, made with locally grown and ground flint corn, was served (Oliver 1995: 79), though kernels of New England eight-row flint corn were found, not in the privy deposit linked to the Boardmans, but in the stairwell deposit associated with the Tracys, where they were preserved because they had been charred (Pendleton 1990). Elsewhere in his diary Boardman refers to his asparagus bed and recounts harvesting vegetables such as potatoes, corn, and squash, but as foodstuffs vegetables do not rate a mention as elements of meals. At least 22 species of plants were represented by the seeds recovered from the privy, including table grapes, blueberries, elderberries, blackberries, raspberries, and a wide range of herbs (TAB. 4). From the plant remains and Boardman's mention of growing and harvesting vegetables, we can draw the conclusion that fruit and vegetables were in fact served, but that for Boardman the only non-meat item on the menu worth mentioning was pudding.

Some notion of the Boardmans' dinner parties can be gleaned based on the archaeological and documentary evidence. Boardman's diary indicates that the people who came to dinner were largely part of an extended network of kinfolk, seemingly not people Offin Boardman needed to impress—but they were in fact his in-laws, not his consanguinal kin, because he was estranged from his own relations; the minister was frequently among the other guests. Boardman's probate inventory, recorded 30 December 1811 (TAB. 5) (Essex County Registry of Probate 1811), provides evidence of a well-furbished dining room, with sideboards where silver and napery and knives and forks in a case were stored; a coffee mill reveals that the Boardmans, and perhaps their guests, indulged in fashionable consumption of coffee, perhaps from the same vessels that have been interpreted as tea wares in the archaeological analysis (see, e.g., Beaudry 2010a: 72, TABLE 7.3). The tablewares listed in the inventory are glossed as "China crockery & glassware," but in this instance the archaeological evidence indicates that the ceramic tablewares were chiefly undecorated creamware with some serving vessels, such as sauce boats, tureens, and platters in green- and blue-painted shell-edge

Table 4. Identified plant remains from Feature 6, a stone-lined privy, at the Spencer-Pierce-Little Farm, and their possible uses.

				Uses			
Latin name	**Common name**	**# Seeds**	**# Frags.**	**Food**	**Medicine**	**Non-food**	**Other**
Amaranthus sp.	Pigweed	2	—	x	x	—	ornamental
Brassica nigra	Black Mustard	298	19	x	x	—	improves soil
Chenopodium album	Lambsquarter	186	57	x	x	—	—
Cuscuta pentagona	Field Dodder	6	1	—	x	—	—
Cyperus sp.	Flatsedge	1	—	x	—	—	—
Hypericum perforatum	St. Johnswort	4	—	—	x	—	—
Lepidum virginicum	Pepperweed	4	—	x	x	—	—
Mollugo verticillata	Carpetweed	5	—	—	—	x	—
Morus sp.	Mulberry	—	1	x	x	—	wood; dye; silk industry
Oxalis sp.	Wood Sorrel	1	—	x	x	—	—
Plantago spp.	Plantain	62	7	x	x	—	—
Polygonum sp.	Smartweed	9	—	x	x	—	insect repellent
Portulaca oleracea	Purslane	54	—	x	x	—	—
Ranunculus sp.	Buttercup	14	—	—	x	—	—
Rhus glabra	Smooth Sumac	24	—	x	x	—	dye; tannin
Rubus spp.	Raspberry/ Blackberry	10,342	329	x	x	—	—
Sambucus canadensis	Elderberry	2,508	63	x	x	—	wood; dye; hedgerow shrub
Scirpus/Carex	Bulrush/Sedge	1	—	x	—	—	—
Tradescantia ohiensis	Spiderwort	2	2	—	—	x	ornamental
Trifolium repens	White Clover	24	5	x	—	—	smoking mixture; animal fodder & forage; sachet; beekeeping
Vaccinium sp.	Blueberry	1	—	x	—	—	dye
Vitis sp.	Grape	1,941	453	x	—	—	livestock food; tannin
Total		15,489	937	—			
Source: Smyth 1994.							

pearlware (FIGS. 3, 4) (Beaudry 2010a: 73), all typical of ca. 1800 tableware assemblages in middling social-class contexts; low in price and simply decorated, the Boardmans' tableware was presentable, but not refined or elegant (Barker 2010: 15). Yet the inventory reveals that the Boardmans possessed close to $250.00 worth of silver, possibly in the form of flatware or serving pieces. The only special-purpose ceramic serving vessel recovered archaeologically (there were a number of glass decanters in the privy deposit) is the shell-edged soup tureen shown in Figure 4, so one can infer that soups came to the Boardmans'

Table 5. Dining material culture listed in Offin Boardman's probate inventory, 1811.

Item	Value in dollars
sideboards	30.00
2 tables	12.00
11 tables	20.50
17 table cloths	36.00
11 napkins	4.50
25 small napkins	3.00
110 common towels	18.00
226 ounces silver	248.50
case knives	1.50
knives & forks	4.00
coffee mill	1.00
China crockery & glassware	70.00
tinware	5.00
pewter ware	14.00
3 tea trays	1.50
Source: Essex County Registry of Probate (1811).	

table even though Offin never mentions soup in his diary.

On the other hand, the glassware was not only of good quality, one set of wine stems and another set of tumblers were monogrammed with the letter B (FIG. 5), as was the Boardmans' silver teapot that survives in the collections of the Historical Society of Old Newbury (Beaudry 2008: 189). There is no evidence of elaborate preparation of banquet dishes. Rather, one gets the impression of good, hearty New England fare served in a congenial atmosphere without ostentation. The meals seem to have consisted of an abundance of daily fare, rather than fancy special dishes requiring culinary expertise over and above turning a spit and steaming or baking puddings. Boardman, despite having visited France during the American Revolution, seems to have eschewed the fancy French cuisine and elaborate preparations that the Tracys' cook or cooks attempted. Boardman and his family in the decades following the formation of the new republic seem instead to have become firmly attached to the sort of fare that characterized

Figure 3. Green shell-edged pearlware soup tureen, large serving dish, and sauceboat from the Boardman privy deposit. (Photo by Michael Hamilton.)

Figure 4. Blue shell-edged platter, large serving dish, and sauceboat from the Boardman privy deposit. (Photo by Michael Hamilton.)

Figure 5. Glass drinking vessels from the Boardman privy, including an assortment of tumblers, one monogrammed with Boardman's initial, and a small stemmed wine or cordial glass. (Photo by Michael Hamilton.)

New England "Yankee" foodways well into the 20th century (see, e.g., Oliver 1995 Stavely and Fitzgerald 2004).

Both the Tracy and Boardman households produced grand meals, but ones of differing qualities; through interpreting archaeological and archival information, we are able to comprehend both the special circumstances that led to the rich deposits of food wastes generated by a single episode of feasting at the Tracy household, as well as the nature of meals of far less grand, but, nevertheless, plenteous and rich character served at frequent dinner parties at the Boardmans' table. By combining the various lines of archaeological data with evidence drawn from documentary sources, it is possible to assess not just what food was eaten, but what meals and menus may have been served and, to some extent, what the ambiance of mealtimes may have been like. The effort requires a good helping of imagination, as well, involving sights, sounds, and smells that our own embodied experiences allow us to "know" and to recall, as well as to re-imagine into past contexts. What strikes one the most in considering what was on offer at both the Tracys' and the Boardmans' tables is that the overwhelming sensation for the diners would have been the tantalizing aroma of roasted meat, accompanied by generous amounts of wine and other spirits.

Further Thoughts

I have already found that by trying to think about the archaeological evidence for mealtimes and feasting in terms of the experience —the materiality, if you will—of dining, I have begun to reevaluate the evidence in new and, for me, interesting ways. Using all lines of evidence is important, to be sure, although without the documentary record I would find myself unable to say very much at all about mealtimes at the Tracy household. The abundance of ceramic and glass tableware from the Boardman era provides a much richer body of data to work with, but in this instance the lack of faunal remains would render it impossible to talk about the actual "content" of meals if I did not have Offin Boardman's diary for its scant but useful evidence in this regard. By considering the multiple lines of evidence for meals and dining within the framework of materialities of practice and the objects used in combination to accomplish the social project of conveying status through hospitality, I have begun to find a way to talk about dining as a "total experience."

Hamilakis (2013b: 409) remarks that an archaeology of the senses is an impossible task because the senses "occupy a different ontological ground in comparison with the kinds of materials and social practices and phenomena that are at the center of customary archaeological endeavor"; but he also affirms that

> archaeologies of the senses are, however, not only possible but also essential and feasible, not as representations of the past but as evocations of its materiality, contingency, and (multi)temporality, not as mimetic exercises or reconstructions but as explorations of the range of sensorial possibilities and affordances. (2013b: 409)

Weaving various strands of archaeological and other evidence together in our attempts to comprehend the embodied, sensorial experiences of mealtimes and the practices of dining permits enriched interpretations and maximizes the interpretive value of data available to historical archaeologists. Only by "feasting" on broken glass—and on sherds, seeds, bones, and written evidence—can historical archaeologists bring diners to the table and put food on their plates.

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