

WILSON MUSEUM BULLETIN

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Coastal Maine Cooking: Foods and Equipment from 1760



One of Wilson Museum's most active living-history programs is focused around the kitchen hearth in the historic John Perkins House. Rebuilt in the mid-1970s, the bake oven and fireplace with original crane were first used during the summer of 1976 in celebration of our country's bicentennial anniversary. To prepare for this, Ellenore Wilson Doudiet researched methods of colonial cooking and tested some of the old recipes passed down through her own family and through those in the community. Much to his delight, Hoyt Hutchins, who restored the house and rebuilt the kitchen fireplace and oven, was asked to step up to the plate as taste consultant. With this information, coupled with

an eagerness to experiment, Jo Barrett, then a college student from Penobscot, began a program in 1976 which continues to be as popular today as it was then. Since that first year, fireside demonstrations have been carried on by Patty Hutchins, her daughter Joyce Tarr, and granddaughters Ellenore and Grace Tarr.

What follows is the conclusion from the previous Bulletin of a research paper given by Ellenore Wilson Doudiet at the IX International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, held in 1973, and later published in Gastronomy. The Anthropology of Food and Food Habits; edited by Margaret L. Arnott.

MISSION

Building on the legacy of its founding family, the Wilson Museum uses its diverse collections and learning experiences to stimulate exploration of the natural history and cultures of the Penobscot Bay region and the world.

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Even when crops were plentiful, preservation was a problem up until the twentieth century.²⁶ With luck, winter vegetables and some apples would keep in a cool but frost-free cellar.²⁷ Pickles “put down” in crocks (Gould 1965:138), salted meat, and barrels of cider²⁸ were also kept in the cellar. Pumpkins were prepared and put in crocks with molasses and spices which preserved them and which were included in the eventual pumpkin pie.²⁹ Meat and fish were smoked or salted,³⁰ dried, and hung in a cool dry place.

26. “Household Hint” for June, 1867: “Keep your meat in a dry, cool place, your fish on ice, and your vegetables on a stone floor free from air. Cut your soap when it comes in, and let it dry slowly. Keep your sweet herbs in paper bags, each bag containing only one description of herb. They should be dried in the wind, and not in the sun; and when ordered in a receipt should be cautiously used, as a preponderance in any seasoning spoils it. When oranges or lemons are used for juices, chop down the peel, put it in small pots and tie them down for use. Apples should be kept on dry straw, in a dry place; and pears hung up by the stalk” (Godey 1867:555).

Warm weather presented more problems. “How to Preserve Smoked Meats in Summer: Take black pepper and grind it very fine, the finer the better; then wash the hams or beef, and rub while damp, thoroughly, with the ground pepper; a sufficiency will adhere to them to safely protect them against the depredations of flies and bugs through the summer” (Godey 1867:371).

27. “Frosty cellars: Those who are troubled with frosty cellars are informed that by placing a few tubs of water near their vegetables, it will prevent their freezing: such being the attracting qualities of the water, that it will freeze two inches thick, while potatoes placed along side will not be chilled. It would be well to renew the water once a week, as it will in that time lose much of its life (*The Eagle*, February 20, 1810).

28. In early nineteenth-century New England each farm had an apple orchard. “In the month of October the whole population was busy gathering apples under the trees, from which they fell in heavy showers as the branches were shaken by the strong arms of the farmers. The creak of the cider-mill, turned by a horse moving in a circle, was heard in every neighborhood as one of the most common of rural sounds. The freshly pressed juice of the apples was most agreeable to boyish tastes, and the whole process of gathering the fruit and making the cider came in among the more laborious rural occupations in a way which diversified them pleasantly, and which made it seem a pastime. The time that was given to making cider, and the number of barrels made and stored in the cellars of the farm-houses, would now seem incredible. A hundred barrels to a single farm was no uncommon proportion...” (Bryant 1876:99).

29. This was done in the Brooklin-Sedgwick area up to 1900. My own attempt to keep pumpkin this way did not have ideal results. It would probably be better with a larger amount of pumpkin, which would not mean a commensurate increase in molasses and spices.

30. The kitchen chimney of the John Perkins House, Castine, has a smoke chamber in the second-story section. Two tiers of charred wooden rods once held the meat or fish while it smoked. The chimney was built in the 1780s. Mrs. Gardiner of Boston and Gardiner, Maine, wrote the following in 1763:

“Hams to cure, the New England Way: Let your Pork Legs be cut long and handsome. Scatter a little fine Salt upon them, and then let them lay for two or three Days, rubbing them every Day. Then take more Salt and mix with it Salt-petre, allowing one Ounce of Salt-petre one pound of Salt and one pint of Molasses to each Ham. With this Pickle rub them well, every Day, on each side, for six weeks. Then scatter a little Bran over them and then let them be hung up to smoke, for one month in a Smoke-House, or in a chimney where there is a small Fire but a constant Smoke. One pair of Chops will require the same quality of Salt, Saltpetre and molasses as one Ham. The month of February is the best Time for laying in your Pork, as you will then have Pork whose Fat is firm, and which as been corn-fed . . . The best Smoke for them is raised by fixing Tanners Bark that is sufficiently dry . . . Horse Dung is also said to be the best thing to raise a Smoak from for smoking Hams, Checks, Tongues, Beef &c” (Gardiner 1938:59-60).



Apples and pumpkins were peeled, cut, and dried; corn was husked and hung up, frequently in the attic. Appleparing bees and cornhusking bees were gala events in the autumn.³¹ Milk, cream, butter, and cheese were often taken care of in the milk room—a room at the north, the stone floor of which was somewhat lower than the other floors.³²

In addition to local products, many items were imported. In 1809 the following advertisement appeared in a Castine newspaper:

Salt, Crockery Ware, &c. Just imported in brig Unity, Capt. Lassel, from Liverpool and for sale . . . 250 hhds Salt—9 crates Crockery Ware—20 pieces Manchester Checks—6 cases Gentlemen’s fine Hats—6d, 10d and 20d Nails—White Lead.

Also received by the Packet from the West Indies, 12 Hogsheads Rum³³ and Molasses.

Likewise, a general assortment of English and Hardware goods just received from Boston (*The Eagle*, November 14, 1809).

The following month another merchant advertised

“English and W. Indies Goods, Crockery and Glass Ware, Corn, Flour, Rice, Pork, Onions, Fish . . .”

The wealthier families lived in comfort and some elegance,³⁴ and company meals, then as now, differed from the daily fare. There was “better living than usual (when there were guests) wine or punch on the table at dinner . . . and many nice things for dessert that seemed more proper for Thanksgiving . . .” The younger children, however, might have to wait until their elders had dined before they were served (Brooks 1901:31-32). When a neighbor called, tea, coffee, or wine might be served. For a near neighbor a “plain cotton checked napkin was used. If it was the minister’s wife or . . . [a] sea captain, a white linen one was used” (Limeburner n.d.:13). It was the custom, in Castine, of the wife of a master ship builder

. . . in cold weather . . . to give her servants a mug of flip and a plate of doughnuts for a luncheon, in the middle of the forenoon of a washing day. Flip was made by stirring in a pitcher a mixture of cider, rum, eggs, sugar, and spices. The stirring was done with a very heavy iron poker called a logerhead, heated to red and whiteness (see also Note 12).

31. “...the task of stripping the husks from the ears of Indian corn was made the occasion of social meetings, in which the boys took a special part. A farmer would appoint what was called ‘a husking’, to which he invited his neighbors. The ears of maize in the husk, sometimes along with part of the stalk, were heaped on the barn floor. In the evening, lanterns were brought, and, seated on piles of dry husks, the men and boys stripped the ears of their covering, and breaking them from the stem with a sudden jerk, threw them into baskets placed for the purpose. It was often a merry time; the gossip of the neighborhood was talked over...

Quite as cheerful were the ‘apple-parings’, which on autumn evenings brought together the young people of both sexes in little circles. The fruit of the orchards was pared and quartered and the core extracted, and a supply of apples in this state provided for making what was called ‘apple-sauce’, a kind of preserve of which every family laid in a large quantity every year” (Bryant 1876:101).

Sometimes dried apples were prepared. “The bee was held in the barn...there were a number of tables set out with pans and knives, and needles and strings. Bushel-baskets of apples stood around the tables ...The men pared the apples and some of the women pared and some strung” (Wilkins 1898:133-137).

32. Such a room is known to me in an 1835 home in Brooksville and a still older home in Penobscot.

33. “Rum, molasses, and salt made the fortunes of the town,” has been said so long in Castine that its origin is lost. Certainly these were the most important imports.

In 1750 rum was “in great use with all the English North American colonists...reckoned much wholesomer than brandy made from wine or grain...most of [the] soldiers who drank brandy for a time died; but those who drank rum were not hurt, though they got drunk with it every day for a considerable time” (Kalm 1966 [1937]:325).

Its uses were manifold. The master of a sailing ship took his wife with him to Europe, where she died; he is said to have brought her home in a barrel of rum, for burial in the Castine cemetery.

34. Surviving homes, furnishings, and records speak for this, as also do advertisements in *The Eagle*. Phebe Perkins’ silver spoons and sugar tongs (made about 1805 by a Castine silversmith), her daughter Polly’s silver spoons (examples of the silver are in the Wilson Museum), and the large amount and variety of chinaware fragments found at the Perkins House site indicate wealth and some elegance. Most of these shards date from 1790 to 1830.

“The most common china was white or cream ware, undecorated, and would-be cream ware, pearl ware, stone ware and ironstone...Next in quantity was the printed Blue Staffordshire of 1800-1825. The soft paste china was not only much broken but was flaked from the action of frost, however many of these pieces have been fitted together showing that certain of the Blue Staffordshire plates were printed with scenes of English history. They might...have been brought to Castine during the War of 1812 when the town was occupied by British troops.”

Fragments of a painted-ware saucer (late eighteenth century) were found during the excavation; other fragments of the set were found in the walls of the Perkins House when it was being taken down.

“Recovered during the excavation was a considerable amount of printed Staffordshire in green, light blue, brown, pink or mulberry...a small bit of canary ware and a piece of red printed Staffordshire mug . . .

“There was but little glass...the bases of two hand blown decanters...the base of a contact mold blown caster set bottle; an applied handle from a molded lamp or syllabub glass, several pieces from a pressed flint glass sauce dish...bits of dark green bottle glass...Most of the items were of molded glass” (Archaeological dig...1971).



🍷 This summer's food theme



When the parson called at the same hour, he was served Malaga wine and fruit cake (Brooks 1901:27-28). To men haying in the July sun a refreshing drink of water, molasses, and ginger was taken. "There was always plenty of pie, doughnuts, gingerbread and cookies . . . but cake only on company occasions" (Rawson 1927:76).

The quality of water was important.³⁵ Even today the well water of various farms is discussed, some being considered excellent drinking water and some inferior.

The fishermen and their families had scanty resources, and an unexpected guest might be given dried beef, toasted red herring, pickles, preserves, bread, saleratus biscuits, and tea, or salt codfish (which was toasted and pounded in a mortar to soften it, then buttered and warmed), tea, and, no doubt, bread or biscuits (Brooks 1894:148-154).³⁶ While on board a coasting schooner

. . . the principal diet of the men was "johnny-cake" and fried pork, with a relay of hardtack to fall back upon in case of famine. The johnny-cake was a batter of corn meal mixed with warm water and Saleratus baked in a shallow pan,³⁷ and eaten with pork fat . . . to be out of corn meal was to be without one of the necessities of life . . . (Brooks 1901:280-281).

Another point of view was expressed by a gentleman whose boat was frozen in the ice: "Out of patience, out of tobacco, out of provisions and worst of all, out of rum."³⁸

Corn in many forms, rye, beans, pork, salt fish, molasses, and rum remained the staples. Hasty pudding, often the only breakfast or supper dish, was eaten with milk or molasses.³⁹ Beans baked with pork and molasses, and brown bread of rye, corn meal, molasses, water,

35. In 1763 Mrs. Gardiner wrote, "N.B. Use soft water for old Peas, and hard or Spring Water for young Peas, in making your Peas Soups" (Gardiner 1938:1)

"Split pease...in soft water...To make a good Pease Soup...To make a White Portable Soup—that you may carry...in your pocket (use) soft water"...(Carter 1802: 66-67).

"Boil fresh young vegetables in hard water; a little salt will harden the water at once. Boil dried vegetables in soft water; a little baking soda will soften the water..." (Corson, et al., 1892 (?):56).

36. In another area of New England tea (supper) included bread, butter, tea, and sauce; "no sauce for tea was regarded as very

poor living" (Wilkins 1891:41). Adequate provisions were "plenty of meal an' merlasses, an' some salt fish an' pertaters" (Wilkins 1887:78).

37. Homemade johnnycake would have been better: "Old Fashioned Johnny Cake: 1 cup corn meal, ½ cup molasses, 1 teaspoon soda, 1 cup flour, 1½ cups sour milk, 1 egg, ½ teaspoon salt" (Moore 1967:34).

38. Said to have been written in the diary of Jeremiah Wardwell about 1800.

39. In the 1830s in Castine a boy's "usual supper [was] hasty pudding and milk" (Brooks 1901:165). A boy in Penobscot in the 1930s often had corn meal mush with molasses or canned milk for supper.

was fun and sooo delicious! 



and leavening were the Saturday night supper and Sunday morning breakfast.⁴⁰

Beaten eggs, yeast, and soda (with an acid) provided the early leavens. Molasses or sour milk with soda gave

excellent results. “Sal aeratus,” at that time potassium carbonate or potassium bicarbonate, was available, being made from wood ashes.⁴¹ It was sold as pearlash,⁴² refined potash, or wood ashes (Rawson 1927:69).

40. “Along one side of the storeroom were ranged three bins, with tops that lifted up and served for covers. One of these was for corn-meal, another for flour, and a third for rye-meal. From two of these bins came the materials, every Saturday, for the brown bread that made a part of the Saturday-night supper and Sunday-morning breakfast. Only it was not called brown bread... It was rye-and-Indian bread, being made of rye and Indian meal. ... ‘rine-Injun’ really meant rye-and Indian” (Brooks 1901:17).

An old-time Brooksville cook wrote these recipes:

“Baked Beans: Pick over one quart of beans on Friday night and put them in to soak in plenty of water. Get up at five o’clock Saturday morning—put about half the beans in the bean pot, add ¼ cup molasses, 1 small onion, ½ teaspoon mustard (dry), and a ½ lb. salt pork, a streak of fat and a steak of lean is best, but if you can get only fat pork add about ½ lb. corned beef, 1 teaspoon salt— then put in the rest of the beans and place a slice of pork on top. Add water to cover, put them in the oven and bake until supper time. About half an hour before supper remove the cover from the bean pot so the beans will be nice and brown. Of course you will have to add water from time to time while they are baking.

Brown Bread: 1 cup sour milk, 1½ cups corn meal, 2 T. sugar, 1 heaping t. soda, ½ cup molasses, 1 cup flour, 2 T. butter, ½ t. salt. Mix well. If you have a good steamer that fits into your iron kettle, set the dish containing the bread-mixture in the steamer—cover and steam 2 to 2 ½ hours. If you haven’t a

steamer put the mixture into a greased 2 ½ quart lard pail—put something—a brick will do—into the kettle to set the pail on. Have boiling water in the kettle come half way up the pail. Cover. Steam 2 to 2 ½ hours. Be sure to keep the water in the kettle boiling” (Limeburner n.d.:11).

Brown bread was also made with yeast. “Raised Brown Bread: 1 pint yellow cornmeal; ½ cup yeast; ½ cup molasses; ½ teaspoon salt; 1 salt-spoon soda; 1 pint rye-meal. Put the corn-meal in the mixing bowl and scald it with boiling water, just enough to wet it; let it stand ten minutes, then add cold water enough to make a soft batter. When lukewarm add the yeast, molasses, soda, salt and rye-meal. Beat it well and let it rise over night, or until it cracks open. Stir it down; put it in a buttered and floured tin to rise again; sprinkle flour over the top. Bake in a moderated oven two hours. Brown bread made by this rule was first tested by the writer thirty years ago, when it was a wonder and delight to watch it as it was put on a wooden shovel and placed in the great brick oven” (Corson, et al., 1892 (?):10).

With present-day corn meal, warm, not boiling water should be used to dampen the meal, or enough should be added at once to make the “soft batter.” This recipe makes a moist sweet bread.

41. Wood ashes were also used in making soap.

42. Pearlash was advertised in *The Eagle* (1809, 1810) and was noted in ledgers of the early nineteenth century, and later in recipes (Godey 1873:32, 372, 563).

Later sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) replaced the potassium carbonates and is still used in molasses and sour milk recipes. Yeast, like the Bostonian's hat, was not bought but was something one had, and of which one took great care.⁴³ Recipes for salt-rising and sourdough bread are rare; in the former, the yeast is inherent in the corn meal⁴⁴ or in the potato water (Rombauer and Becker 1962:569). A great number of recipes are for yeast bread and saleratus biscuit. Later, biscuits were also made with sweet milk, when alum (potassium aluminum sulphate or sodium aluminum sulphate) or cream of tartar were added.⁴⁵ Baking powder was not manufactured until about 1865 (Morrison 1904:54;⁴⁶ Kendall 1935:497-498, 416; Rockett 1971:74).

A baker provided bread, biscuit (ship's biscuit?), and gingerbread during much, if not all, of Castine's early settlement. In 1809 four sheets of gingerbread at 15 cents a sheet appear on a ledger.⁴⁷ It must have been similar to the "sheet of gingerbread" that Lem, "opening the big firkin . . . took out . . . and, breaking it in halves, buttoned under his jacket." It must have been fairly rugged, as it remained under that jacket while Lem walked several miles and then slept under a haystack; and, though "jammed and crushed," it was eaten the next day "with real enjoyment" (Brooks 1901: 77-82.⁴⁸

In the mid-nineteenth century it was thought important for a girl to be able to make good coffee, tea, johnnycake, saleratus biscuits, doughnuts, molasses gingerbread, brown bread, cookies, apple pie, curd cheese, a boiled dinner, and

baked beans, and to fry potatoes and eggs (Limeburner n.d.:4-5).

At this time the cast-iron cookstove was coming into use, followed by changes in utensils and cooking methods. The long-handled pans and immense kettles disappeared; waffle irons, kettles, and pans were made to fit into the round stove holes when the lids were removed. A Penobscot ledger⁴⁹ notes a stove and flat irons sold May 1, 1849; this is the first stove mentioned, although the ledger dates back to 1841. Two stoves were sold in 1850 and five in 1851, of which one is listed as a "cook stove and Furniture—\$14.00, pipes and elbow @ 10¢—1.90." We do not know whether these were all cookstoves, as the term stove was long used for any heating device. "Benjamin Franklin invented what is often called a stove, as early as 1742. This was really a cast iron fireplace . . ." (Thwing 1936:16-1, 17-6).

The first stove in Castine was sent for to Boston in 1838. This "new-fangled contraption" was of great interest to the children, who watched the doors being opened and the drafts adjusted.

With the invention of the cook-stove came a demand for matches to light by scratching. Heretofore, the fire had been raked up at night in the ashes of the fireplace; and when these were uncovered next morning, there were coals ready to light the brimstone matches used by all families at that time. One could not rake up a stove.

43. Potatoes and/or flour, water, salt, and sugar form the usual recipe for yeast, but to these ingredients must be added "any good yeast."

44. Salt-rising bread is so called because the yeast is not affected by salt. If corn meal is used, it must, according to Rombauer, be water-ground; however, the recipe below gave good bread when the usual finely ground meal was used. The soda was omitted to make sure all leavening was in the corn meal.

"Salt Rising Bread: 1 pint new milk; corn meal to thicken; 1 gallon flour; 1 tablespoon sugar; 1 teaspoon salt; pinch of soda. Set the milk on the fire and stir in cornmeal to make thick as mush. Set in a warm place all night. In the morning it will be light. Put the flour in a bowl, pour in the mush and mix with warm milk and water, equal parts; add the sugar, salt and soda. Make a stiff batter, cover and keep warm. In an hour it will be light. Work in flour to make stiff dough, let it rise, mold in loaves, put in greased pans, let it rise and bake" (Corson, et al., 1892(?):9).

45. Saleratus or "Sour Milk Biscuits: Rub a piece of butter or lard about the size of an egg into a quart of flour. Wet with sour milk into which you have previously stirred 1 teaspoon saleratus that has been dissolved in a little hot water. Use as much milk as you need to make a dough that can be rolled out on your breadboard. Have it about one inch thick, cut with floured biscuit cutter and bake in a very hot oven. It will take practice to get just the right amount of flour and milk. If you use lard, add a little salt."

"Sweet Milk Biscuits: Make the same as sour milk biscuits but add two teaspoons of Cream of Tartar" (Limeburner n.d.:9).

46. A recipe for baking powder given in an 1890s cook book: "1 ounce super-carbonate soda; 7 drachms tartaric acid (in powder). Roll smoothly and mix thoroughly. Keep in tight glass jar or bottle. Use one teaspoonful to a quart of flour" (Corson, et al. 1892(?): 8).

47. Castine and Penobscot ledgers, now in Wilson Museum, Castine.

48. Most recipes for molasses cookies will do for sheet gingerbread. The dough is poured on a greased cookie tin and patted flat. One handwritten nineteenth-century recipe from New York State calls for soda, cream of tartar, and alum.

"Molasses Cookies: 2 cups New Orleans molasses, 1 cup shortening (butter or beef drippings), 1 teaspoon cream of tartar, 1 cup hot water (put in two cups)—in one cup put two tablespoons soda, in other teaspoon grated alum,—tablespoon ginger, 1 teaspoon salt, butter & molasses together, then soda water—last alum water."

Another recipe for "Molasses Cookies: 2 cups molasses, ½ cup sugar, 2/3 cup lard, 2/3 cup hot water, 1 tablespoonful ginger, 1 tablespoonful cinnamon, 1 teaspoon salt, 2 teaspoonfuls saleratus, flour enough to roll out" (*The Hammoniton cook book* 1809(?):36).

49. Devereux ledger (Castine and Penobscot n.d.:276, 299, 307, 352, 365, 371, 373, 380, 334, and 320).

There were other problems: “the bigger boys were obliged to saw and split wood for the new stove. Wood for the fireplace was sawed into two pieces; that for the stove must be cut into three pieces and be split small.” The boys also “on baking days built a fire in the big brick oven in which beans, bread, and Indian pudding were cooked” (Brooks 1901:22-25). One might guess from the latter that, even after the advent of the stove, the brick oven was still used for large bakings.⁵⁰

Until the first quarter of the twentieth century most families had a woodlot; and each autumn a large pile of wood, near the back door, cut and ready for splitting, was the sign of a provident household. The stove fire would go out at night unless a heavy hardwood stick kept smoldering, but in the morning a fire was quickly started.

Fried foods were easily and quickly cooked over the hot fire. Tea stood on the back of the stove, getting blacker and stronger as it stood. More tea and more water were added from time to time. Eventually the teapot would be emptied and the routine repeated.⁵¹

Though these old-time methods of cooking have largely disappeared from present-day Maine kitchens, the old-time foods have not: tea, coffee, rum, molasses, baked beans and brown bread, salt fish, New England boiled dinner, fried potatoes, fish, clam chowder (made with milk, salt pork, and potatoes), saleratus biscuits, pie, and doughnuts which were the mainstay of life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are today the most popular foods.

50. A handwritten recipe from Massachusetts, probably of this period, suggests the use of either type of oven.

“Brown Bread: Two quarts of Indian meal, one large spoonful of salt, 1 cupful of yeast, ½ cup of molasses, mix it with as warm water as the hands will bear, butter deep pans, wet the hands with cold water to put it in, set it to rise an hour.

Bake it in a hot oven 4 or 5 hours. If baked in a brick [oven] it is best to let it remain over night” (from a notebook containing cooking and medical recipes, probably about 1850).

51. True only of some of the simpler homes; others were very particular to have fresh tea and boiling water.

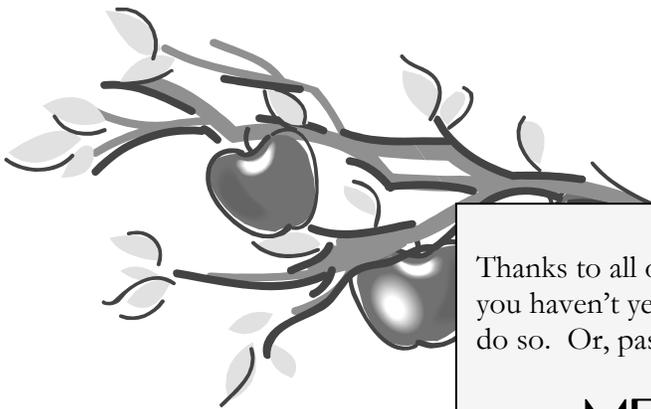
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| <input type="checkbox"/> STUDENT | \$ 15.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> FAMILY | \$ 40.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> INDIVIDUAL | \$ 25.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> LIFE (INDIVIDUAL) | \$ 500.00 |
- (Memberships must be renewed annually – except for Life members)

NAME _____

EMAIL ADDRESS _____

WINTER ADDRESS _____ SUMMER ADDRESS _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP _____ CITY, STATE, ZIP _____

TELEPHONE _____

I would like to volunteer – please contact me.