

BOOK REVIEWS

Kathy Neustadt. **Clambake: A History of an American Tradition.**
Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992. Pp. x + 227,
illustrations. \$16.95 paper.

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Kathy Neustadt's exploration of the annual clambake of the Allen's Neck Quakers simultaneously documents a unique American festival and addresses many of the most pressing topics in contemporary ethnography. She discusses feminist theory, issues of power and relationships between ethnographer and informant, the role of research and the researcher, the invention of tradition, and the idea of a useable past, all within the rubric of an "old fashioned" New England clambake. In addition, her exploration of the epistemological issues of feeling versus thinking and insider versus outsider place this author firmly in the center of the work. All of these factors combine to produce a very modern ethnography.

In Neustadt's attempt to appeal to "amateur, professional, local and culinary historians; to folklorists, anthropologists and Americanists; to clambake enthusiasts and Allen's Neck inhabitants; and to [her] mother" (5), she separates her work into three sections: History, Ethnography, and Meaning. This organization allows those with a more general interest in the clambake to read the first two sections of the book, skipping most of the theoretical musings. This organization has both advantages and disadvantages for the scholarly reader. On the one hand, all of her theoretical influences and references are gathered together and explicitly related (or rejected). For students of foodways, her two final chapters, devoted to the meaning of the clambake, are a concentrated essay on the significance of eating and food preparation for a particular group. On the other hand, by segregating the analysis from the historical and ethnographic sections, the scholarly musing on the meaning of the clambake seems to be subtly disconnected from the phenomenon itself. This separation, unwittingly or not, reflects on Neustadt's concern for the role of the researcher in the experience of the researched. Should Lévi-Strauss and Jack Goody's ideas about food be intertwined with those of Peter Gonet, the Allen's Neck bakemaster? Or should the *doing* of

the clambake be separated from the *thinking* about the clambake? This ambiguity is apparent in Neustadt's awareness of her own anomalous situation in Allen's Neck. Neither a native (one who creates the clambake) nor a tourist (for whom the clambake is created), she oscillates between analyst and participant, never truly comfortable in either role. Her awareness of this liminal position permeates the entire book.

The first section covers the history and tradition of the New England clambake. Neustadt is very concerned here with the idea of the invented tradition, as discussed in Hobsbawm and Ranger's work (1983). Clambakes clearly have an invented history, composed of equal parts of nostalgia, romanticism, social status, and regional self-consciousness. Neustadt explores how these various parts worked together to create both the clambake itself and the various meanings and resonances the clambake has for participants.

Section two carefully documents the clambake at Allen's Neck, from the collection of the rocks and seaweed to the final clean-up. Extensive photographs contribute a great deal to this section. The reader becomes familiar not only with the steps for a successful clambake (and the various opinions as to what makes it successful), but also with the people of Allen's Neck. The values, relationships, and history of the community are each painstakingly related to the practice of clambaking in general, and to the annual public event which is the center of the book. Neustadt also discusses the ways in which these community values are necessarily affected by the outsiders who come to Allen's Neck once a year to enjoy the clambake. Commercialism, tourism, regionalism, and an individual sense of continuity and tradition all work together to shape the annual clambake. In this way, Neustadt demonstrates the ways in which people can individually construct a community event.

Neustadt ends with a discussion of "the signified meal," the physical, hot, moist, rather slimy plate of clams, tripe, and corn that exists apart from, though permeated with, the ideas discussed in her book. She is concerned with the lived experience.

The clambake, in its experiential form, is *not* a text, even if people who aren't covered in sweat and clam juice choose to 'read' it that way. The experiencing of Clambake is not metaphoric, metonymic, paradigmatic, syntagmatic; it is far less mediated and conscious than all of this.

I think it is legitimate to say that sometimes a clam is just a clam. (186)