

1-1-2009

## Encyclopedia of Folk Medicine: Old World and New World Traditions

Chris J. Goertzen

University of Southern Mississippi, Christopher.Goertzen@usm.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://aquila.usm.edu/fac\\_pubs](https://aquila.usm.edu/fac_pubs)



Part of the [Music Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Goertzen, C. J. (2009). Encyclopedia of Folk Medicine: Old World and New World Traditions. *Journal of American Folklore*, 122(483), 110-111.

Available at: [https://aquila.usm.edu/fac\\_pubs/1240](https://aquila.usm.edu/fac_pubs/1240)

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact [Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu](mailto:Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu).



PROJECT MUSE®

---

*Encyclopedia of Folk Medicine: Old World and New World Traditions*  
(review)

Chris Goertzen

Journal of American Folklore, Volume 122, Number 483, Winter 2009, pp.  
110-111 (Review)

Published by American Folklore Society  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jaf.0.0072>



➔ *For additional information about this article*  
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/256986>

historical literature alone. Since folklorists and anthropologists were not the intended audience, however, perhaps one should not expect this.

*Eating Culture*, edited by Tobias Döring, Markus Heide, and Susanne Mühleisen, presents another take on American and British ways of eating. The book is a compilation of articles largely taken from the international symposium *Eating Culture: The Politics and Poetics of Food Today*, which took place in Germany in the spring of 2000 at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main. The combined ideas of twelve non-American authors on British and American foodways and literature—and also the minority foodways in those two countries—provides access to the perspective of the “other” for American (and also, presumably, British) readers.

The collection is divided into three parts: “Culinary Politics: Creolization and Identification,” “Edible Fictions: The Poetics of Food Writing and Translation,” and “Visual Pleasures: Food Images and the Hungry Gaze.” While many disciplinary perspectives are included throughout, part 1 uses sociological, historical, and anthropological approaches; part 2 largely offers literary analyses; and part 3 takes its perspective from film studies.

One widely explored issue is the problem of authenticity in cuisine and race/ethnicity. This is examined in Berndt Ostendorf’s chapter “‘Jambalaya, Crawfish Pie, File Gumbo’: The Creolizing Cuisines of New Orleans,” Ching Lin Pang’s “Beyond ‘Authenticity’: Reinterpreting Chinese Immigrant Food in Belgium,” Shirley Tate’s “Talking Identities: Food, Black ‘Authenticity’ and Hybridity,” Mark Stein’s “Curry at Work: Nibbling at the Jewel in the Crown,” Rüdiger Kunow’s “Eating Indian(s): Food, Representation, and the Indian Diaspora in the United States,” and Suzanne Reichl’s “‘Like a Beacon Against the Cold’: Food and the Construction of Ethnic Identities in Black British Novels.” Poverty and nineteenth-century awareness (or lack of awareness) of its societal causes are explored in an interesting article by Sarah Moss entitled “Fetching Broth from Hatfield: Sustaining the Body Politic in Jane Austen’s *Emma*.” Offering a historical perspective,

Heike Paul’s “Tasting America: Food, Race, and Anti-American Sentiments in Nineteenth-Century German-American Writing” provides a window on the reaction of German visitors and immigrants to American foodways or, from the German perspective, the lack of foodways or a recognizable cuisine. Sidney Mintz’s “Eating Communities: The Mixed Appeals of Sodalinity” analyzes *pho* in the Vietnamese diaspora and donuts in Canada as symbols of identity. Mintz’s article, the first in the collection, helps provide a cohesive theoretical framework that aids in contextualizing the disparate articles that follow.

Overall, the essays in *Eating Culture* do hang together as a coherent volume, although their perspectives are quite diverse. While not all chapters may be relevant to any given reader’s interests, their diversity does serve to provoke interdisciplinary consideration. Additionally, the discomfort that occasionally arises from seeing one’s own culture analyzed by others, particularly when one identifies with one or more of the cuisines being analyzed, is especially edifying. As scholars, all of us struggle with the issues of insider versus outsider perspectives and the desire to remain fair in assessing our subjects. In this context, taking up the perspective of the observed, rather than the observer, is instructive.

**Encyclopedia of Folk Medicine: Old World and New World Traditions.** By Gabrielle Hatfield. (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004. Pp. xxii + 392, introduction, 47 photographs or other illustrations, references cited following each entry, index.)

CHRIS GOERTZEN  
*University of Southern Mississippi*

This encyclopedia has a tighter focus than its title suggests. Gabrielle Hatfield almost exclusively focuses on British and British-derived North American vernacular medicine from the sixteenth century to the present. There are some 242 alphabetically arranged entries, including 13 on “people” (5 on specific individuals, the others on occupations or social roles such as

the midwife or the seventh son), 100 on “ailments” (which, in addition to illnesses, include problems such as drunkenness, bad breath, contraception, cuts, hunger, and so forth), 117 on “healing agents” (from cayenne and horehound to dead man’s hand and toads and frogs), 8 on “ideas” (amulet, doctrine of signatures, and so forth), and 5 on “cultural traditions” outside the Anglo-American mainstream that the book is about (African, Celtic, Mexican, Native American, and Shaker, each very briefly treated). Most entries are between a page and a page and a half long, while a few are as short as half a page. A handful are as long as three or four pages.

A Scottish botanist, Hatfield writes clearly, balances ideas well, and documents copiously, using parenthetical notes that refer to full bibliographic entries given at the end of every article. Rather than repeating the full citation, putting them at the end of the volume would have saved considerable space; half a dozen central reference works receive full citations roughly a hundred times each. Perusing the individual essays can be useful, and just thumbing through the book is rewarding, too. One might think of looking up “ginger” or “ginseng,” “eczema” or “epilepsy,” but it is hard to imagine deliberately seeking out “dew” or “freckles” (a blight for which remedies were apparently sought repeatedly). I looked carefully at the entry for the humble potato, treated in two pages of prose followed by a page of references (spanning pp. 276–9). The potato has been employed—raw, cooked, peeled, carried as an amulet (I intend to take this up), in a sock, or even cut into pieces and thrown away—to treat over fifty ailments, from appendicitis, asthma, and back pain to ulcers, warts, and wounds. Since the entry is organized in part geographically, some of these ailments appear repeatedly within it. All uses are referenced, but, with this large a number of uses cited in so little space, there is no room to explore beyond manner of use (poultice, in a tea, and so forth). One can get some idea of how important a given remedy was for a given ailment by going to the corresponding entry: the ailment “rheumatism” is mentioned more often in the article on the potato than the reverse. Cross-checking

also reveals plenty of the sorts of errors that will always dog encyclopedists: “eczema” appears in the article on the potato, but “potato” does not come up in the “eczema” article, despite a reference to that article in the “potato” entry. Nevertheless, this is a valiant first effort at bringing together a considerable body of information. Even though the individual entries are short, Hatfield’s catholic approach to selecting topics for articles and the thoroughness with which the entries are documented will make this a helpful source for those researching British and British-derived American folk medicine.

**Carville: Remembering Leprosy in America.**

By Marcia Gaudet. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004. Pp. xvii + 221, foreword, preface, 16 photographs, one map, two appendices, endnotes, bibliography, index.)

CHRIS GOERTZEN

*University of Southern Mississippi*

From 1894 to 1999, Carville, Louisiana, was the site of the only in-patient facility in the contiguous United States for treating Hansen’s disease, historically known as leprosy. Because of the high incidence of Hansen’s disease in southern Louisiana, locating the facility in a former plantation between New Orleans and Baton Rouge made sense. The patients there, in quarantine until the 1960s, constituted a community that was rich in narratives and traditions resulting from the intersection of their common malady with the usual benchmarks of life. In all, they narrate “a story of survival and a quest for dignity” (p. 4).

The first chapter of Marcia Gaudet’s *Carville: Remembering Leprosy in America* introduces the history of the disease, both in scientific terms and in the popular consciousness, and presents Carville as a treatment center and a community. Chapter 2, “An Exile in My Own Country: The Unspeakable Trauma of Entering Carville,” relates memories of the emotional devastation accompanying diagnosis and then analyzes both how the patients chose to voice those memories in personal narratives and how they