

Lemon and Candied Lemon Peel

by *Lynne Belluscio*

As visitors to the LeRoy House discovered this past weekend, Charlotte LeRoy loved lemons. Her little hand written receipt book of 86 recipes, includes several for lemons. There is lemon cheesecake, lemon (candy) drops, lemon custard, lemon shrub, and lemon pudding. Many of the other recipes include lemon peel, or lemon juice. She even copied Naomi Wadsworth's lemon liquor recipe. And although lemon peel is used in many of the recipes, there is not a recipe for candied lemon peel. The closest recipe for preserved lemon peel is noted at the end of Mrs. Wadsworth's lemon liquor: "A substitute for citron – When the rinds are taken out of the brandy, put them in a syrup of loaf sugar." Several folks who sampled the candied lemon peel, wanted to know how to make it. (This recipe can be used with oranges, limes and grapefruit.) There are several methods. Some people use a sharp knife or peeler to cut off the outer peel. I usually save the whole peel after squeezing the juice out and cut off some of the pith and membrane. Then the peels are simmered in water for a few minutes. The water is poured off and the peels are simmered again in fresh water. This removes some of the bitterness. Drain the peels and let cool. The next step is to remove the white pith. I strongly suggest that you use a silver teaspoon. (Stainless steel spoons aren't sharp enough to remove the pith.) After the pith is removed, the rind can be cut in strips. Make a syrup of 2 cups of sugar and 1 cup of water. Simmer the peels in the syrup until they

are transparent. (Be careful not to burn the syrup.) Then remove the strips and drain them on a rack. As they cool, roll each strip in sugar and let them dry. Some directions say to place the peels in a plastic container with a lid. I prefer to let the strips dry and become brittle. Then I put them in a plastic bag. Some people also save the syrup and use it to add to tea.

Where did lemons, oranges and limes come from in 1823? Certainly not Florida or California. From what I can find out, most of the oranges and lemons came from Spain and Sicily in the Mediterranean region. They were picked green and packed in boxes and shipped to New York, sometimes taking weeks before being sold. It would be a couple of weeks before the lemons would be delivered to LeRoy.

With lemons, of course it was necessary to have sugar. Many of Charlotte's recipes specifically mention loaf sugar. The sugar was formed into tall hard cones. Pieces were broken off with a sugar hammer or a pair of tongs. Then the sugar had to be pounded in a mortar. (Granulated sugar would come much later.) Most of the folks in LeRoy probably used maple sugar that they could make themselves, but the LeRoy family had the money to buy white loaf sugar. So I did a little more research. I knew that the source of sugar came through the islands in the Caribbean, produced by slave labor. Sugar, like molasses and rum was part of the slave trade. But what I didn't know, was that most of the sugar refineries were located in New York City. As early as 1730, sugar was being refined in New



Lemon Pomanders



Sugar Loaf

York at a refinery owned by Nicholas Bayard. (Bayard is related to the LeRoy family, but it is a genealogical nightmare to untangle that family chart.)

With all the lemons, it's possible that Mrs. LeRoy had some of them made into pomanders. These were used to add a pleasant smell to rooms, closets, and trunks. First, using a fork, make holes in the lemon rind. Then press whole cloves into the holes. The pleasant spicy lemon smell permeates the room. Keep the pomanders in a place where there is good circulation, until they dry. Usually they will dry and become hard in a couple of weeks. Once in a while, they will mold and spoil, but once dry, they will keep for years.

Here is the recipe for Mrs. Wadsworth's lemon liquor. The original recipe calls for a gallon of good brandy and 18 lemons, and 3 pounds of sugar (six cups) and a pint and half of fresh milk. I would suggest cutting the recipe in fourths- - So for a quart of good brandy add the rinds of five lemons; 1 and ½ cups of sugar and a cup and quarter of milk. Let it stand for three days, stirring it two times a day. Then filter it through paper (I use a paper coffee filter.) I have had a bottle of this lemon liquor on the shelf for two years and it is just as good as it was when it was made. And I like it a lot better than Lemoncello!