The American Gourd Society is always interested in the historical uses of gourds. If you have an item to contribute, please [e-mail us!](mailto:rehmje@valkyrie.net)

* [Saving the Bottle Gourd in Kenya](http://www.new-agri.co.uk/06-1/develop/dev04.html) http://www.new-ag.info/06-1/develop/dev04.html
* [Research: Origin of Gourds in America](http://www.americangourdsociety.org/history/PNASpaper.html)
* [Historical use of zucca gourds as food source](http://www.americangourdsociety.org/history/zucca.html)

**A Little History of Gourd Societies in the United States**

In 1937 the "Gourd Society of America" was founded by Mr. Sterling Pool of Rockport, Massachusetts. In 1970 the society was moved to Ohio and renamed The American Gourd Society.  Today, AGS has over 4,000 members and acts as the unifying body for 24 state chapters.  State chapters are chartered in Alabama, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin..

The American Gourd Society, Inc. is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the education and instruction of those persons who are interested in the culture, uses, history, and/or crafting of gourds.  There are a number of activities that AGS pursues to achieve these goals.  The society publishes four issues a year of  ***THE GOURD*** magazine for members.  This publication is a vehicle for news and information about people, events, state Chapters, books, seeds, crafting and other gourd related subjects both domestic and foreign.  AGS is the unifying body for all state   
Chapters and provides a network of contacts for people and organization worldwide.

Each state chapter member is asked to support both AGS and their State Chapter. [For national membership only](http://www.americangourdsociety.org/join.html), send $20.00 annual dues directly to AGS, Box 2186, Kokomo, IN 46904-2186

[Research: Origin of Gourds in America](http://www.americangourdsociety.org/history/PNASpaper.html)

**Domesticated Bottle Gourds Brought to the Americas From Asia**

Research by a team of anthropologists and biologists suggests that the domesticated bottle gourds widely used by prehistoric peoples were likely brought to the Americas some 10,000 years ago from Asia. Since bottle gourds are thought to have originated in Africa, the previously held theory was that the gourds had floated across the Atlantic Ocean from Africa and were picked up and used as containers once they reached the Americas. Genetic comparisons showed that the gourds found at archaeological sites in the Americas were a closer genetic match to modern-day gourds in Asia. The current research suggests that these bottle gourds may have been brought in boats from Asia, hand-carried across a land bridge, or floated across the Bering Strait.

The gourds of northeastern Asia were originally transported by humans from their native Africa. When humans harvest, store, and plant seeds over a sustained period, the plant populations adapt through genetic and morphological changes making it possible to distinguish the populations from the various regions. In addition to providing information about the origin of American gourds, it is interesting to note that this research shows that the bottle gourd -- essentially a container, not a food crop -- is the earliest known domesticated plant grown here. Radiocarbon dating indicates that gourds were used as containers in the New World for at least 9000 years.

The collaborative research was done by scientists from Harvard University, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History, Massey University in New Zealand and the University of Maine. The full report is available online on the website of the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. Go to: <http://www.pnas.org/cgi/content/full/102/51/18315>

**8th Annual Zucca & Gourd Festival (1998)**

**The Grist Mill @ Keremeos, BC**

**by Sharon Boyd**

Cuyler Page is the enthusiastic historic site manager of The Grist Mill in Keremeos, B.C. For the past 5 years we have had on going "gourding" conversations when we meet yearly at the Northwest Flower & Garden show. He peaked my curiosity with fascinating stories about the Zuccas of Keremeos. This year I traded him Ginger Summit's new book for the promise to send me a Zucca. He persuaded me to come to the 8th Annual Zucca and Gourd Festival to conduct work shops. They grow gourds easily but haven't seen much gourd craft.

Keremeos is 6 hours north east of Seattle, through magnificent mountains on very good roads. It is the near desert area of British Colombia receiving only 8 to 10 inches of rain a year and summer temperatures can hit 115 degrees. Since the introduction of irrigation, the Similkameen Valley has become an agricultural garden spot with acres of orchards and produce.

The Grist Mill was built in 1877 and served the settlers of the area for 10 years until the coming of the railroad. After years of misuse and neglect, the property was purchased by the Province and Cuyler was hired to research and rebuild the historic site. The "foot prints" left by the 1877 machinery have been used to reconstruct the mill and put it back into working condition. It has been quite a challenge and new discoveries are frequent. It is the only remaining pioneer flour mill in the West.

As part of the heritage site development, circle gardens, an apple orchard, and vintage wheat fields, representing over 100 years of valley agriculture, have been planted. Gardening is organic and seed saving is a critical part of their mission.

Zuccas (Lagenaria Siceraria), were a commercial crop in the valley from the 1930's to the 1950's. Originally from Africa, the Zucca's were cultivated in Sicily. Recognizing the value of the Zucca, Sicily carefully guarded the distribution of seeds. In the early '30s an American was able to secure seeds (I heard the word "smuggled") and they were planted in California where distribution of seeds again was closely controlled. An enterprising Canadian acquired some in 1938 and the Zucca found a new home in the Similkameen Valley.

Why was the Zucca so sought after? The versatile vegetable was a very profitable crop, the average size was 60 to 100 lbs with the record being 150 lbs. The soft, white flesh is tasteless and odorless but was easily colored and flavored to resemble various foods. It was an extender for jams, masqueraded as "maraschino cherries", became "lemon, orange" and "citron" for fruit cakes and appeared as "watermelon pickles". In 1942 over 400 tons of Zuccas were processed, In the 1950's their use declined and the bulky giants disappeared from cultivation, to be replaced by fields of turnips.

Planting Zuccas in the heritage gardens was an important priority for the gardening staff. They contacted former growers in Canada and California, assuming someone would still have seeds, to no avail. Next they checked with the national seed gene banks without success. Then they contacted AGS and were put in touch with Glen Swenson of Sandwich Illinois. Swenson, the only one found to be growing the Zucca, graciously shared his seeds.

The first seeds were carefully planted in 1991 and of the 10 gourds to reach maturity, one had viable seeds, enough to re-establish the gourds. The seed from succeeding gourds has been shared among local growers.

So many residents had fond recollections about the old Zucca days, the Mill staff decided to have a "Zucca Reunion", and invited the locals to bring their Zucca pictures and stories —200 people showed up!

The success of the Zucca's re-introduction in B.C. is celebrated each October with a Zucca & Gourd festival. This year, on a beautiful October day, the Zuccas were brought for all to see. The class designations were for Best Dressed, The Longest, The Heaviest, Best Crafted, etc. The Reid brothers, arrived with several "big ones", that averaged 90 Ibs each. Charlie Reid won for the heaviest and the longest. An imaginative gourd cottage by Colleen Freeman won the craft award. "Veggie Man" created by Dorothy and Fred Tomlin was the hands down favorite for best dressed. If the enthusiasm of the workshop participants is any indication, entries in the craft section will be considerably larger next year.

The Zucca is still useful today as a food source. Paul & Aaron Rath presented Cuyler with Zucca pickles and Jalapeno Zucca Jelly, which we didn't have the opportunity to sample.

Jim and Laura Massic of Paradise, California, returned to the show for a second year, as honored guests. In California, Jim's father had driven Zuccas from the fields to the processing plant. When upgrading the processing plant proved too expensive, the growing came to an end and the giant Zuccas disappeared. Determined to find this elusive gourd, Jim and Laura were finally put in touch with Cuyler, who sent them seeds. They have had good results growing the Zukes, and were kept busy at the show relating California Zucca tales and demonstrating the use of the old processing tools they have acquired. I found it fascinating how Zucca seeds have traveled between the two countries for almost 70 years.

Over 500 people came to the 3 hour event, they snacked on Zucca cake, admired the gourds, toured the working grist mill, museum and gardens with Cuyler leading the way on his 1800's Penny Farthing bicycle.

The visit was a step back in time, dried gourds piled high in antique buggies, old farm equipment, much of which has been restored and is used. The Mill staff dress in 1800's clothing, it would be difficult to imagine them wearing any thing else. The picturesque Visitor's Center, with hop vines twining around the eaves, is located under old horse chestnut frees that have been on the site for over 100 years. Inside is a delightful tea room with marvelous food and a wonderful gift shop. Every one was so gracious, it was hard to leave. We came home with wonderful memories and an other Zucca, 40 inches tall!

It was an event that verified once again the universalityofGOURDS!

\*\*\*The American Gourd Society is grateful to Sharon Boyd ([johnsharonb@msn.com](mailto:johnsharonb@msn.com)) for sending us the color photos to enhance her article which originally appeared in *The Gourd -* Fall 1998. As an added note Sharon included this bit ot folklore she came across referring to the time when the gourds were grown in Sicily: "For 10 Zucca seeds you could buy a goat and for 5 seeds, a pretty good wife."  Sharon is a gourd artist (Black Feather Design) in Bellevue, Washington.

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