

Tributaries

ON THE NAME OF THE JOURNAL:

Alabama's waterways intersect its folkways at every level. Early settlement and cultural diffusion conformed to drainage patterns. The Coastal Plain, the Black Belt, the Foothills, and the Tennessee Valley remain distinct traditional as well as economic regions today. The state's cultural landscape, like its physical one, features a network of "tributaries" rather than a single dominant mainstream.

— JIM CARNES, *from the Premiere Issue*

Tributaries

Journal of the Alabama Folklife Association

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Editors' Note

Alabama food traditions are this year's theme for *Tributaries*, Volume 13. This issue features articles by several former contributors to the journal including SUSAN THOMAS and JOYCE CAUTHEN. We also welcome first-time contributors WILLIAM ALLEN, EMILY BLEJWAS, JESSICA LACHER-FELDMAN, VALERIE POPE BURNES, and SYLVIA STEPHENS.

Many of these articles are the result of fieldwork sponsored by the Alabama Folklife Association. Thomas's gumbo research, Burnes's barbecue inquiry, Allen's stew documentation, and Stephens's work with lacy cornbread were all featured at the "Alabama Foodways Gathering" on November 7, 2009, at Montgomery's Old Alabama Town. In her article, Lacher-Feldman presents the community cookbook as an important cultural document. Blejwas modified a chapter of her upcoming book *'Til It's the Color of Me: The Story of Alabama through Food Traditions* (forthcoming in 2012) to tell the story of sweet potato pie and its unlikely role in the civil rights movement. Beginning the issue, we offer Cauthen's article that is derived from her Alabama Humanities Foundation-sponsored lecture titled "Please Pass the Folklore."

During the past year, we have mourned the passing of significant Alabama folk artists. Kathryn Tucker Windham died as we were compiling this issue. Kathryn was a nationally known storyteller and writer and a friend of the AFA who performed frequently at the Alabama Folklife Festivals of the early 1990s. Alabama Folk Heritage Award winners Gail Thrower, culture bearer of the Poarch Creek Indians, and Enoch Sullivan, patriarch of the Sullivan Family Band, passed away this year. Blues great Eddie Kirkland also died unexpectedly. And, in the realm of foodways, we mourn the death of stew-maker Boss Hill of Elkmont.

We appreciate the many suggestions by AFA members and others and wish to acknowledge the annual copyediting and design efforts of Randall Williams. Please send your suggestions, comments, and contributions for future issues.

ALABAMAFOLKLIFE.ORG OFFERS AN easy way to purchase AFA documentary products, join the AFA, and order current and past issues of *Tributaries*. The website also has updates on the AFA annual gathering, current projects and news about the biennial Alabama Community Scholars Institute. Data forms for fieldwork can be found under the “Resources” section of the website. For your convenience, we have also included information about the Alabama Folklife Association and its documentary products at the back of this issue. The AFA now has a page on Facebook as well, offering updates on folklife events around the state.

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Alabama Foodlore: Family Food Traditions Collected Across the State

Joyce H. Cauthen

Since 2004 I have had the pleasure of conversing with people throughout Alabama about their food traditions. For the Road Scholars Speakers Bureau of the Alabama Humanities Foundation,* I give a lecture entitled “Please Pass the Folklore: Family Traditions in the Kitchen and Around the Dinner Table” in which I ask my audiences to share their own foodlore. Besides being fun, these visits give me an opportunity to explain the terms “folklore” and “folklife.” Both refer to ways of talking, working, playing and eating that are acquired in families and other community groups. These ways may be learned in mother’s kitchen, father’s fishing boat, church socials, school cafeterias, or bunkhouses at camp. They are not learned in the classroom or from TV but informally over a period of time from family and friends. Though it is hard to recognize our own folklore when we are in the midst of it, thinking about our foodways helps us see that we have folk traditions as worthy of attention as those of the wizened butter-makers, log cabin builders, or fiddlers of the *Foxfire* books. “Please Pass the Folklore” allows me to guide people in thinking about their own traditions and, in the process, to collect food stories, sayings, superstitions, and practices from them.

We usually start with a conversation about Thanksgiving dinner, America’s most traditional meal. Turkey, due to its association with the original thanksgiving celebration in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1621, is accepted nationwide

*The Road Scholars Speakers Bureau provides public presentations and lectures on a variety of humanities topics. For more information visit www.ahf.net/programs or call (205) 558-3999.

as the main dish for the meal. Beyond that, menu items may vary by region: for instance, sweet potatoes in the South, Irish potatoes elsewhere; cornbread dressing in the South, stuffing made from wheat bread elsewhere. Individual families fit their own favorites into this national and regional framework by adding or substituting various ethnic dishes, or food items they can raise, catch, or hunt themselves, or things picky children will eat. Anyone who has moved to a different region of the country or married into a family unlike her own witnesses the strength of food traditions when, for instance, she brings coleslaw or pickled eggs to a Thanksgiving meal and no one in the new setting will touch them, even though those dishes had been a significant part of her own tradition.

Many people repeat the Thanksgiving meal on Christmas Day but New Year's Day calls for its own symbolic dishes, those that tradition holds will assure prosperity in the coming year. In the Scots-Irish and African American South that would be black-eyed peas accompanied by collard greens cooked with hog jowl. The peas symbolize pennies; the greens folding money, and though the hog jowl is mainly for seasoning, one person told me it "makes you humble." It is said that "rice is for riches"; thus some families serve Hoppin' John, made of black-eyed peas and rice. Those who move to the South often relinquish their New Year's Day cabbage or sauerkraut and corned beef in favor of the traditional black-eyed peas and greens served here.

Certain occasions call for special dishes, as well. For birthdays, of course, there is cake, the flavor often chosen by the celebrant. In many families the honoree also chooses the menu for his or her birthday dinner though young people tell me that the custom is now to let them choose the restaurant. The practice of taking foods to the homes of ill or recently deceased persons also leads to food traditions. Recipes for dishes that can be assembled quickly from foods that are already in the freezer or pantry are used over and over again by cooks. I was told this is especially true in towns with weekly newspapers where one may not learn until the last minute the need for such a dish. And in Alabama, family food traditions are, of course, often associated with football. A child told me that when his father was in college he concocted a breakfast sandwich he could cook on a hot plate in his dorm room. His family now eats them on the morning of every Auburn football game.

The dishes we select for special gatherings may be influenced by the part of the state or the community we live in. Gumbo is esteemed in Mobile, goat and chicken stews in Limestone County, summertime barbecue suppers in Sumter County, wild game suppers in the Pineywoods, boiled peanuts in the Wiregrass area (I have been told that the best are in Henry County). At receptions in Alexander City you are likely to find a unique kind of stacked or ribbon sandwich consisting of three pieces of crustless bread and two fillings: peanut butter and grape jelly in one section, pimento cheese in the other.

As we can see, tradition plays a part in determining the foods we eat. We have also learned through the folk process many sayings and practices associated with food. Though most of us do not regard ourselves as superstitious, there are few who do not know what to do if salt is spilt at the dinner table. We may not actually take a pinch of the salt and throw it over our left shoulder, but we probably think about it or say that we should have. Or if someone starts sharing his bad dream at the breakfast table, it is likely that someone will say, "Don't tell it before breakfast or it will come true." When someone takes the last biscuit or cookie from the serving plate, there's a chance that he will say "Kiss the cook." A woman taking that last serving may be told that she will be an old maid.

Alabama's late esteemed storyteller Katherine Tucker Windham told us how to eat a slice of pie: Save the pointed tip for last, she said, and make a wish when you eat it. Though this is not a custom I was familiar with, I tried it. I started at the wide end and worked my way toward the tip, making my wish with the last bite. It was too awkward to be worthwhile, I decided. Years later I had a eureka experience at a luncheon when a woman at my table cut off the tip of her pie slice, moved it to the side of the plate, ate the rest, then popped the tip into her mouth. Much better, I thought, and I asked her about it. She answered that when her girlfriends ate pie, it was customary to eat the tip last and wish for the boys they hoped to marry. Another woman at the luncheon had a more elaborate procedure: After eating the tip, do not speak. You must back out of the room to make the wish come true.

Folk sayings associated with dropping utensils or food are perhaps more familiar and easier to follow. If you drop a knife, a man is coming; a fork, a woman is coming; a spoon, a child is coming. If you drop a dishcloth, com-

FIGURE 1

In the tradition of the Berry Family (Hoover, Ala.), the person who gets the long end of the wishbone has his wish come true. On this occasion Grant Berry was more fortunate than his twin brother Garret. (Photo by Joyce Cauthen)



pany (gender and age unspecified) is coming. If you drop something edible you may be told, “What won’t kill will fatten,” or “God made dirt; dirt won’t hurt.” In the last decade it has become likely that you will call out, “*n*-second rule!” with *n* being 3, 5, or 30, indicating how many seconds you have to pick the morsel up and eat it before germs find it.

Old and new folk practices are associated with wishbones and apple stems. Most people know that a wishbone or pulley bone retrieved from a whole cooked chicken or turkey can make a wish come true for the one who draws the longest (or shortest) end when two people pull on it. The outcome may also signify who will marry first or who has to wash the dishes. A similar practice involves pulling on the two halves of an Oreo cookie. The one who gets the side with the cream filling gets his wish fulfilled, or at least gets to eat the filling. Another variant of this practice may be played in school cafeterias or fast food restaurants. Someone makes a knot in the paper cover of a drinking straw and two friends pull on it. The person who gets the end with the knot will have his wish come true. Young women have long twisted apple stems to find out whom they will marry. Holding the apple in one hand and the stem in another, they turn the apple and recite the alphabet. The letter that is being called out when the stem breaks will be the initial of the first name of their boyfriend- or husband-to-be. Today the same result can be achieved flexing the pop-top on a soft drink can until it breaks.

A family’s folklore may include words and phrases that are often repeated at the dinner table. In earlier days a child who refused to eat certain items on

her plate would be told “waste not, want not” or to consider the starving children in China or Albania. She might be persuaded to try a “brownie bite” or a “no-thank-you serving.” To express appreciation for the food on the table, a person might say, “I wonder what the poor folks are eating tonight.” “Save your fork” was a common expression indicating that dessert would be served after the meal. In Choctaw County at least one family expressed the same idea with the phrase “the stick’s in the window,” referring to the practice of propping up a window in which a pie was cooling. Desserts might be topped with “calf slobber,” a fairly common term for “whipped cream.” If the dessert was pound cake, it might have a “sad streak,” meaning an area not fully cooked.

Many of these expressions, games, and superstitions are regionally, nationally, or internationally known and are of anonymous origin. Those who shared them with me could not remember where they learned them; they just always knew them. It is most likely they heard them, more than once, from family and friends as they sat around a dining table. And at the table they also may have learned or contributed to a more personal form of folklore, the kind maintained within one family or family-like social group. Family folklore, which is definitely not of anonymous origin, involves stories as well as names for food items that are used only within the group that created them. When a story is alluded to or a family food word is used in front of a dinner guest, an explanation must follow, leading to the retelling of stories which may be embarrassing or annoying to individuals who later see them as part of their family heritage. Examples:

Church Peas: English peas so named because they were always served at Wednesday night dinners at church.



FIGURE 2

Like many girls her age, Emily Berry twists an apple stem to tell her the initial of the first name of the man she will marry. In this instance it was “F.” (Photo by Joyce Cauthen)

Bird Day: Birthday, as in “What kind of bird day cake do you want this year?”

Foon Man: A made-up word to describe a dish improvised from food on-hand, as in “Tonight we are having Chicken Foon Man.”

Pig Biscuit: Biscuit made from scraps of left over dough.

Granburgers: Hamburgers made by grandmother.

Middle things: Condiments, as in “Please set the middle things on the table.”

Snuff biscuits: Small biscuits created for children using a snuff can as a cookie cutter; opposite of “cathead” biscuits.

Embroidery, also dambrosia: Mispronunciations of ambrosia.

Studebakers: Mispronunciation of rutabagas.

Turnip juice: A term used by a “teetotaler” aunt who wouldn’t say “pot liquor.”

Go-withs: Side dishes that complement the main course.

Peggy pancake: A pancake made for the smallest child in the family from the last dribbles of batter.

Chairs!: A mispronunciation by a child of the toast “Cheers!” that is now used as that family’s traditional toast.

“Annie Pearl me a biscuit”: To toss a biscuit to someone at the end of the table rather than pass it on a plate, as done by Aunt Annie Pearl.

Common themes of family stories told at the dinner table involve cooking disasters of new brides, a grown-up’s eating habits when a child, and relatives who would not share recipes.

A woman told me a family story concerning her mother who could never get around to writing down the recipe for her fabulous chocolate chip cookies. One day the mother thought she was having a heart attack and while they awaited an ambulance, she dictated the recipe in halting breath to her daughter. Fortunately, Mother lived. The recipe would have survived without this effort, however—it turned out that she had memorized it off the Hershey’s chocolate chip package.

When we take time to think about the simple, basic subject of food we see its power to evoke memories and inspire lasting stories. After thinking about our foodways we can better recognize our own folklore and understand the

value of the folk process in preparing foods and passing on our stories, sayings, and superstitions.

My father was a second-generation German-American. My mother, already a good traditional Southern cook when she married, was expected to make favorite German foods such as homemade noodles. She had little help in this from her mother-in-law who, according to family legend, did not want her famous cooking skills excelled and sometimes failed to disclose vital ingredients when she shared her recipes. Despite my grandmother's ploys, my mother learned to make wonderful noodles that she served at holiday dinners. I still have a vivid mental picture of those thin circles of dough drying on dishtowels laid out on all the beds in the house on Thanksgiving and Christmas mornings. When the dough was dry enough she would slice it into strips, reserving the broken and misshapen ones to be sautéed in butter and served brown and crunchy on top of the boiled noodles. Served under turkey gravy, they were the hit of the meal to me. Many years later, when she could no longer cook and was living with my husband and me, we attended a Thanksgiving dinner with a group of friends where, to our surprise, one brought homemade noodles just like my mother used to make. He, too, had always eaten them on holidays in his German family. It was a Proustian moment for both of us, flooding us with memories of the days when she was considered the best cook in Lake Jackson, Texas.

For a wedding present she gave me a stack of index cards on which she had written recipes for foods I had enjoyed as a child. Forty years later I got up the courage to make noodles myself. On Valentine's Day 2011, I got out the recipe and carefully followed each step. Mixing up the egg and flour was easy. Rolling the dough into thin circles that did not plaster themselves to the counter was not, however. How I wished I had paid more attention when she made them. After several failed attempts I remembered that she was a big user of wax paper, and after sprinkling flour generously on that, I succeeded in rolling out noodle dough that could be lifted onto dishtowels to dry. The noodles turned out great and I'll probably start taking them to holiday dinners. I promise myself that I will not have my feelings hurt when other guests bypass my dish because noodles are not part of their tradition.

We don't like to try new dishes at Thanksgiving dinner! ■

Chicken Stew and Goat Stew in Northwestern Alabama

William S. Allen

Most people probably think of stew as a seasonal food, something to be eaten in the cold weather months. But in northwestern Alabama, stew is eaten year-round. Not just any stew, though. The preference is for chicken stew or, on special occasions, goat stew. In this article I will chiefly be talking about chicken stew, but the recipe is much the same for both. The article is based on research I did for the Alabama Folklife Association in 2009 and 2010 and information from interviews Joyce Cauthen did with Boss N. Hill and Marvin Smith in 2009.

In an area of the state roughly bounded by Mississippi, Tennessee, Interstate 65, and a line level with the bottom edge of Morgan County, chicken stew and goat stew are popular enough to have become a local food tradition. Occasionally the stews can also be found in the southern counties of middle Tennessee and in rare instances Madison and Cullman counties in Alabama.

These stews, made from recipes passed down from generation to generation, are cooked in quantities from just enough to feed the immediate family to one hundred or more gallons at a time for fund-raisers and social events. Many of the largest pots used are family heirloom cast-iron pots formerly used for doing laundry or making soap. For stirring these large stews, the implement of choice is a wooden canoe paddle or a hand-carved paddle of similar size. In addition to sales for fund-raising, chicken stew and goat stew are often featured at purely social events.

In researching this tradition, I searched the on-line archives of the major newspapers in north Alabama and southern Tennessee on a weekly basis for chicken or goat stew events. The plan was to make a list of all events in the

area and to conduct interviews with representatives of the listed groups, but that idea was quickly cast aside. There were just too many of them. The problem wasn't finding groups to interview, it was selecting from among the many found in the newspapers or suggested by area residents.

It is a rare week that passes without an announcement in one of the area newspapers about a chicken stew sale. Goat stews are made less frequently and mostly for the larger events. Stew sales are held at festivals; as fund-raisers for benevolent associations, churches, school programs, scout troops, and other community organizations; and as benefit events for local families or persons facing emergency financial difficulties.

The Stew

If you enter "chicken stew" in your web browser, it will return page after page of links. The variations are seemingly endless. Here in northwestern Alabama, though, there is only one way to cook chicken stew. Slight variations are allowed, but they are few. Any major variation, as one informant said, ". . . ain't chicken stew."

At some point in prehistory, people discovered that cooking meat, grains, and/or vegetables in water made the ingredients more palatable, provided a stomach-filling broth, and fed more people than would the main ingredient alone. The longer the food cooked, the more tender the meat became, an important point as the earliest cooks were likely using wild animals for their meat. Probably, like the use of fire itself, the discovery was made independently in many different places and at many different times rather than spreading out from a single discovery.

Stew is found in almost every known culture and is ancient in origin. References to stew are found in the Book of Genesis and the writings of the Greek historian Herodotus (fifth century BC), and there are lamb and fish stew recipes in an AD fourth-century Roman cookbook, "Do Re Coquinaria," attributed to Apicius.¹ We also know that stews were common in England at least by the Early Middle Ages and probably long before. Pease Pottage—as in the nursery rhyme, "Pease Porridge Hot"—is a Middle English term for a vegetable stew based on dried peas with some salt pork thrown in (if the family could afford it).²



FIGURE 1

Chicken stew as served at Athens American Legion Post #49. The Ladies' Auxiliary keeps a supply of hot cornbread (cooked in cast iron skillets) available for the entire time stew is being served. (Photo by William S. Allen)

All this points to an answer to the question, “How did the stew tradition develop in northwestern Alabama?” The answer is that the early Alabama settlers brought a stew tradition with them as a part of their culture. Like all peoples, they adapted their recipes to the foodstuffs available in their new home. All of the ingredients of chicken stew were known in the Old World well before the first Europeans who would eventually settle in Alabama had sailed to America. Some New World ingredients had found their way to Europe but were not widely eaten there during that period. But even if the immigrants were not accustomed to eating corn or potatoes in their countries of origin, they quickly added those items to their diet when they arrived in America.³

The People

The earliest white settlement into northern Alabama was primarily by people from the British Isles, the largest sub-group of these being the Scots-Irish, a

term not used in their country of origin.⁴ This group began arriving in force in the British colonies of America in the early to mid-1700s. They were not particularly welcomed by those already established in the colonies and so they tended to move on to back-country areas of Pennsylvania, Virginia, Georgia, and the Carolinas. From there, they moved down and across the Appalachians to Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi.⁵

Descendants of these early Scots-Irish Protestant settlers make up the bulk of those now carrying on the stew tradition in northwestern Alabama. A noted exception can be found in St. Florian, an unincorporated Lauderdale County community adjacent to Florence. St. Florian was founded by German Catholic immigrants in 1872. Within five years, St. Michael's Catholic Church in St. Florian began a chicken stew event that is still held annually.

Research on the people of northwestern Alabama would not be complete if it did not include the African American community. Although chicken stew is a part of the diet of area African Americans⁶ and I frequently saw black customers at stew sales, I could find no notices of stew sales or large stew events by African American groups. When I asked Peggy Allen Towns, a prominent African American historian in northwestern Alabama, about this, she stated that to her knowledge blacks in the area did not make large amounts of chicken stew for fundraisers or social events.⁷

The Events

Although a few cooks I met while researching stew events have now switched to steel pots, the majority still favor cast iron. These cast-iron pots, ranging from twenty to one hundred gallons, can be very expensive, especially as many heirloom pots have been converted to planters by having holes drilled in their sides and bottoms, taking away their usefulness as cooking vessels.

If an organization plans to make a hundred gallons of stew for a fundraiser, the cooks will not use just a single one hundred-gallon pot; they will use several smaller pots and fill each to approximately two-thirds capacity to avoid spillage. Another reason is that as the stew thickens it becomes more difficult to stir and constant stirring is required to keep the stew from sticking and burning.

To solve the expense problem, it is common for one organization to borrow cooking pots from another. For example, Tanner Volunteer Fire Department,



FIGURE 2

Volunteer firemen at Tanner Volunteer Fire Department making 105 gallons of chicken stew in four pots ranging from 30 to 65 gallons in volume. Note the jars on the table in the foreground that customers have brought in to be filled for take-out stew. (Photo by William S. Allen)

the first volunteer fire department established in Limestone County and the first to have a stew-sale fundraiser, has a full array of thirty- to sixty-five-gallon iron pots. They loan these to churches and other fire departments for stew fundraisers.

Carrying this cooperative spirit even further, Athens resident Danny Moss managed for many years what was known as the Benefit Stew Trailer. Everything needed for a stew fund-raiser was kept on this trailer which, with the last-minute addition of perishable items, could be towed to a location in the community and quickly set up to begin making stew for the event. The beneficiaries of these events were often families who had experienced unexpected loss or medical expenses.

My second comment concerns the stew cooks themselves. It was common that when I contacted an organization, I would be told something like, "Oh, Mr. ____ is the person you should interview." Mr. ____ would prove to be an elderly man who had been cooking chicken or goat stews for many years and

was still involved in that organization's stew sales event. These men were a trove of information about the stew itself and the history of the tradition.

As I conducted interviews and visited various stew events, however, I began to see that often the men I had been encouraged to interview now served only in advisory positions. There is a good reason for this. Making chicken or goat stew, even in small quantities for home use, can be labor intensive, especially if the traditional recipe is followed closely with no short cuts.

In most of the places that I observed stew being prepared for a sales event, the men (most cooks were men) who were in charge of the recipe and did the actual cooking were in their forties to mid-sixties. They had served a long "apprenticeship" and had now moved up to the head cook position. Many of these head cooks had begun their participation as teens, carrying supplies, running errands, and scrubbing the pots after use. The next step up for them would be as young men grasping canoe paddles and keeping the stew stirred. They finally became designated as cooks when older men retired from active participation. Because the recipes used for making the stews are more often passed on orally than in writing, it was during this apprenticeship period that they learned what they would need to know to make a good stew.

An exception is eighty-six-year-old Charles Hagood of Moulton in Lawrence County, who has been cooking chicken stew in large quantities for more than forty years. He has made stews for many events, but in recent years he has limited himself to events at the Moulton VFW and American Legion and, for the past five years, the annual Chicken and Egg Festival in Moulton.

Mr. Hagood learned by watching his uncle cook stew in an iron wash pot over an open fire in his mother's back yard. The uncle was somewhat protective of his recipe, so Mr. Hagood's initial efforts met with mixed results. As he puts it, "The first few years, it tasted awful."

Judging by the stew Mr. Hagood and his crew produced at the 2010 Chicken and Egg Festival, he long ago overcame that difficulty. At that festival, he was still active in adding ingredients to the stew, but due to increasing physical problems he has since decided that he will no longer be able to participate in stew events except as an adviser.

Another cook connected to festivals is Jimmy D. Falkner of Waterloo in Lauderdale County. Jimmy was born on a farm and learned to cook at an early

age. When he was nine years old, his mother became very ill with red measles and was confined to her bed for several weeks. “My father had to get in the crops, so that left me to do the housework and cooking,” he said. Although this lasted only a short time, Jimmy continued to be interested in cooking. His recipes are based on “what my mother told me and a lot of trial and error.”

For several years, Jimmy had his stew pots set up in Waterloo to greet the incoming riders on the Trail of Tears Remembrance Motorcycle Ride. He also has cooked his stew for the annual Waterloo Heritage Day festival, church socials, softball team support rallies, and almost every other type of local event that could be mentioned. But it isn’t all just about festivals and fund-raising. When the whim strikes, Jimmy will call various relatives and they will all gather in his yard to make large pots of chicken stew just for the fun of it.

One of the most eagerly awaited social stew events each year in northwestern Alabama has been the gathering on the first Wednesday in May at the home of Boss N. Hill in Elkmont, Limestone County. Boss also grew up on a farm. His father’s livestock always included a number of goats, so goat meat was part of their regular diet.



FIGURE 3

Boss N. Hill supervises stew preparation at his 2009 gathering. (Photo by William S. Allen)

About thirty years ago, Boss and a small group of his friends decided to spend a day making goat stew and chicken stew for a social activity. This became a yearly event. As the years passed, family friends were also invited, and then friends of friends began to show up.

As word spread, more and more people arrived at the annual stew event and anyone who made their way to Boss's yard was welcome to line up for free bowls of stew and crackers. In the last several years the event was held, a thousand or more people would be in attendance. In 2009, the last year that Boss hosted the gathering, three pots of chicken stew, two pots of goat stew, and one pot of beef stew—totaling 150 gallons—were served.

Another well-known stew event is the United Terry Club annual reunion held each Labor Day. This event started as a social gathering and has since morphed into a fund-raiser. Terry is the most common surname in Lawrence County. In 1960, a group of Terry men sitting in a barbershop in Courtland decided to organize a Terry Club and begin having an annual reunion. They purchased the old C. R. Terry homestead on County Road 151 and held the first reunion there that year.

Just as the Terry family has grown in number since the first Terry arrived from Ireland in 1805 and headed for Alabama, the reunion has expanded from its smaller beginning. "At first," Betty Terry said, "this one would bring some chickens, and that one would bring some potatoes . . ." That relaxed style didn't last long, though. The number of Terrys showing up, many bringing friends, increased every time the reunion was held. Larger cooking pots were bought and ingredients were purchased in bulk to fill the demand for stew.

Over the years, the Terry Club has improved the property by building a large clubhouse and four pavilions, one on the foundation of the original dogtrot cabin after it burned down. They also dug a three-acre lake. The property is used at no charge by club members (anyone is now allowed to join) for camping, fishing, and general relaxation. Weddings, revivals, and music fests are also held at the site.

The annual Terry Club Reunion is open to the public and 850 to 1,200 people typically show up each Labor Day. To meet the costs of the ingredients and to maintain the property, a modest fee is now charged for the food served at this gathering.



FIGURE 4

From left, Carl Terry, Calvin Terry, Farris Terry, and an unidentified man in the background prepare chicken stew for the annual Terry Club Reunion. (Photo by William S. Allen)

Preparations for the main food attraction, chicken stew, are begun in the afternoon of the Sunday before Labor Day. Pickup trucks bring in the two large cast-iron pots that will be used, their accompanying gas burners and propane tanks, cases of canned tomatoes and corn, and sacks of potatoes and onions. While the pots and burners are being set up and tested by the cooking crew, other people peel and dice onions and potatoes and put them in chests of ice water to preserve their freshness for the next day.

As the mist is rising from the lake at dawn on Labor Day, the cooking crew fires up the burners under the pots and the year's stew begins to take shape. Approximately five hours later, the stew—110 gallons in 2010—is declared ready and serving begins. For those seeking variety, fried fish plates are also available.

The Terry Club is located about seven miles down a winding two-lane road, but politicians can always find a crowd, especially in election years. From lo-

cal coroners to the occasional governor of Alabama, they come to the reunion to shake hands and ask for votes. Any who want to speak can, but they are encouraged to keep it short. The crowds are much more interested in hearing the bluegrass and country music played by local bands.

Because chicken stew is a popular regional dish and because they can often acquire the ingredients through donations or at discount prices, a chicken stew fund-raising sale is a win-win situation for churches and nonprofit organizations. For churches throughout the area, from the aforementioned St. Michael's Catholic Church in St. Florian to the Punkin Center Bible Way House of Prayer in south Morgan County, chicken stew sales have proven to be a lucrative fund-raising technique. Austinville United Methodist Church in Decatur, for example, built a fellowship hall largely with monies collected during chicken stew sales.

Most organizations have one or two stew sales a year, but American Legion Post #49 in Athens has one every month. Like many service-oriented organizations, Post #49 supports a number of community causes. Their stew sales help to fund these causes and to keep the post operational. But why do something every month that requires so much time and effort? The answer lies in the nature of chicken stew sales events.

Every organization that was researched depends on take-out—using containers the organization supplies or containers that customers bring to have filled—for the bulk of its sales. But many groups also sell stew by the bowl to be eaten on-site. Post #49 is one of these. The stew is sold from 10 A.M. until 1 P.M. and the post's meeting hall is usually packed the entire time with people eating stew and socializing.

This social aspect was brought up by every interviewee. As an informant from another organization said, "When you get that belly full of food, you'll be a friend to anybody." That's true. At every stew event that I attended, whoever was sitting next to me would be sure to strike up a conversation. People come to Post #49 month after month because it's a place where they can share a meal and socialize.

The Recipe

As stated earlier, the recipe for chicken stew and for goat stew is much the

same. Goat stews are more prevalent in Limestone County, but they are not unknown in the other counties. One significant difference is that chicken stew cooks buy slaughtered and plucked chickens while Limestone County goat stew cooks like Carlos Shannon of Piney Chapel and Marvin Smith of Coxey slaughter and prepare the goats themselves. “From on-the-hoof to on-the-table,” Carlos says, “it takes three days to make a good goat stew.”

The recipe below is a composite of recipes collected during my research and includes accepted variations on the basic recipe. I’m assuming that most readers are not going to make fifty gallons of chicken stew for Sunday dinner, so I’ve adjusted this recipe for an average-sized family meal. Whatever quantity the reader plans to make, the important thing to remember is the formula, meat : potatoes : onions = 1 : ½ : ¼. Amounts of other ingredients can be adjusted according to quantity of stew being made. (For larger quantities, simmer longer—much longer.)

Chicken or Goat Stew

- 1 large chicken, approximately 4 pounds, or 4 pounds of goat meat
- 2 pounds of potatoes, peeled and diced
- 1 pound of onions, peeled and diced
- 2 14.5-ounce cans of diced or crushed tomatoes with juice*
- 1 14.5-ounce can kernel corn**
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 5 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper***
- 1-2 tablespoons butter****

Place chicken—whole or cut in pieces—or chunks of goat in large stock pot and cover with water. Cook, adding water as needed to keep meat covered, until tender. Remove meat from pot and set aside to cool. Skim excess fat from broth. Add diced potatoes to broth and cook “until you can squish a chunk between your fingers.” Meanwhile, de-bone and shred meat, discarding skin of chicken. Return meat to pot and add remaining ingredients. Cook over low heat for about an hour and a half. Stew is to be slowly simmered, *never* allowed to boil.

Stir frequently to prevent stew from sticking to the pot. Add water as needed to prevent stew from thickening too rapidly, but keep in mind that a very thick stew is the desired goal. Serve with crackers or corn bread, sliced dill pickles, and iced tea. Any leftover stew will keep well in your freezer.

Variations:

*If desired, the amount of canned tomatoes may be reduced and an equal amount of tomato sauce substituted. Some goat stew recipes omit tomatoes altogether.

**Cream style corn may be substituted for whole kernel corn, but if so, add cream corn in last 30 minutes of cooking and stir stew constantly after corn is added.

***For the adventurous, 1 teaspoon of cayenne pepper and/or a couple of generous dashes of Louisiana hot sauce may also be added. Even if not added while cooking, it is usual to have a bottle of hot sauce available on the table when the stew is served.

****Butter, usually added only if cayenne pepper or hot sauce has been included, reduces the chances of heartburn according to many of my informants.

Conclusions

The question arises: Why are these stews so popular in northwestern Alabama and not in other parts of the state? A part of the answer may be that for much of its history Alabama has been a rural, agricultural state. Most people did not travel far from the area in which they were born. Thus, local food traditions developed that did not spread to other areas. The state is now more urban and there have been greater population movements, but for the most part food traditions remain strongest close to their point of origin.

For whatever reason, the chicken and goat stew tradition of northwestern Alabama is one that will likely continue far into the future. The practice provides opportunities for local people to socialize, it is a winning strategy for fund-raisers, and the stew is just really, really good. ■

Notes

In the interval between submitting this article to *Tributaries* and completion of the editing process, Million Wade Terry, one of my primary informants for the United Terry Club, and Boss N. Hill passed away. Both were fine gentlemen, well-respected in their communities, and a pleasure to talk with.

- 1 Among many sources, see article, “A Brief History of Stew,” by Mark Faher in the Web journal, *New Partisan*, March 1, 2005.
- 2 For definition of pottage, see Merriam-Webster on-line dictionary. Gradually, “pottage” came to be replaced by “porridge” and now refers principally to oatmeal.
- 3 Even today, many Germans regard corn as something to be fed to livestock, not something to be eaten by humans. (Personal experience gained by author while stationed with U.S. Army in Europe.)
- 4 For more on the Scots-Irish, see *The Scots-Irish: A Social History* by James G. Leyburn (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), and *Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America* by David Hackett Fischer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- 5 For early settlement of the area, see *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State* by William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, and Wayne Flynt (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994); *Poor But Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites* by Wayne Flynt (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001); and *Early Settlers of Alabama* by James Edmonds Saunders and Elizabeth Blair Saunders (BiblioLife, 2008; latest of many reprintings). A shorter but informative description of the early settlement can be found in “Clash of Cultures: The Creek War in Alabama,” *Alabama Heritage*, Spring 2009.
- 6 Column by Sherhonda Allen, “A Stew That Does Us Proud,” *Florence Times-Daily*, November 9, 2008. (Although she adds additional vegetables to her version of chicken stew.)
- 7 Conversation with Peggy Allen Towns, July 15, 2010.

Life, Death and Barbecue: Food and Community in Sumter County

Valerie Pope Burnes

On any given Thursday, Friday, or Saturday night in the spring, summer, and fall, members of seven small communities in Sumter County line up to say the blessing as long tables filled with smoked pork and homemade food stretch before them. Food is the sustenance of life, and in Sumter County in the west Alabama Black Belt region, clubs formed for the purpose of gathering to eat barbecue have become the lifeblood of the small communities that dot the landscape. Barbecue not only feeds the body, it sustains the soul of these rural communities.

The barbecue gathering was already a staple of Southern culture by the time Sumter County was established after the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830. Barbecues had been used by politicians to round up support for campaigns since the early days of Alabama history and they were an accepted, almost irresistible institution.¹ White citizens in the area recalled barbecues as a way to meet those living on other plantations, especially after being bound to their plantations during the rainy season by the impassable Black Belt clay that made roads too slick and gummy for travel. According to one source in a nearby county, any excuse for a barbecue was greeted with delight by members of the community. The end of the task of rounding-up the hogs was also cause for celebration.² Eating large quantities of pork during this time was not just for whites, however. Former slaves recounted hog-killing as a time of jubilation and eating. It meant that the weather had cooled and the cotton crop would soon be harvested. It also meant that there would be plenty of food to eat for the coming year. The slaves were allowed a time of relaxation at the completion of the hog-killing task.³

It takes a lot of food to feed a group, and meat is an expensive commodity. But there were a lot of hogs around Alabama prior to the Civil War. During the antebellum period, Southerners ate around five pounds of pork for every one pound of beef they consumed. Evidence of the South's dependence on pork is found in the list of items lost to Union soldiers during the Civil War. According to one property owner, the Union army took "six cows . . . fifteen hogs, [and] fifteen hundred pounds of bacon."⁴ Per pound, hogs were the cheapest source of meat. They were driven to the swamps to forage on the land and then rounded up for killing.⁵ They did not require much output for the amount of meat the owner received in return.

During the Civil War, driving hogs to the swamp was an effective strategy to keep invading Union forces from stealing the animals.⁶ As Union forces began to invade Mississippi, the Confederate government drove thousands of hogs across the state line into Alabama to keep them out of Northern hands.⁷ Located on the Mississippi-Alabama line, Sumter County received a large number of hogs. Though the hogs were somewhat controlled and the meat was sold on shares to be slaughtered and salted or smoked, many pigs inevitably escaped into the forests and swamps in the county and mixed with the wild hogs already there. Many hogs that already roamed the region were descendants of hogs left by DeSoto when he ventured through Alabama in the sixteenth century.⁸ In testament to the large number of hogs already in the area by the time the Confederate government drove their herd through, the river near which the county seat of Livingston was settled is named the Sucarnochee River, which is a Choctaw phrase meaning "Hog River."⁹

Barbecues likely continued in Sumter County after the Civil War, but there is not much information about them for six decades after 1865. In 1927 a barbecue club was founded by white citizens in the small community of Geiger in the north central part of the county. It began the modern era of barbecue clubs in Sumter County and was the first of seven clubs that gave new life to the tradition of smoking and pulling pork, and then drowning it in a secret sauce. All seven clubs – Timilichee, Emelle, Panola, Boyd, Epes, Cuba, and Sumterville—have carried these traditions into the twenty-first century. The story of the clubs is one of a mostly friendly competition between seven communities in Sumter County. The two major towns in the county, Livingston

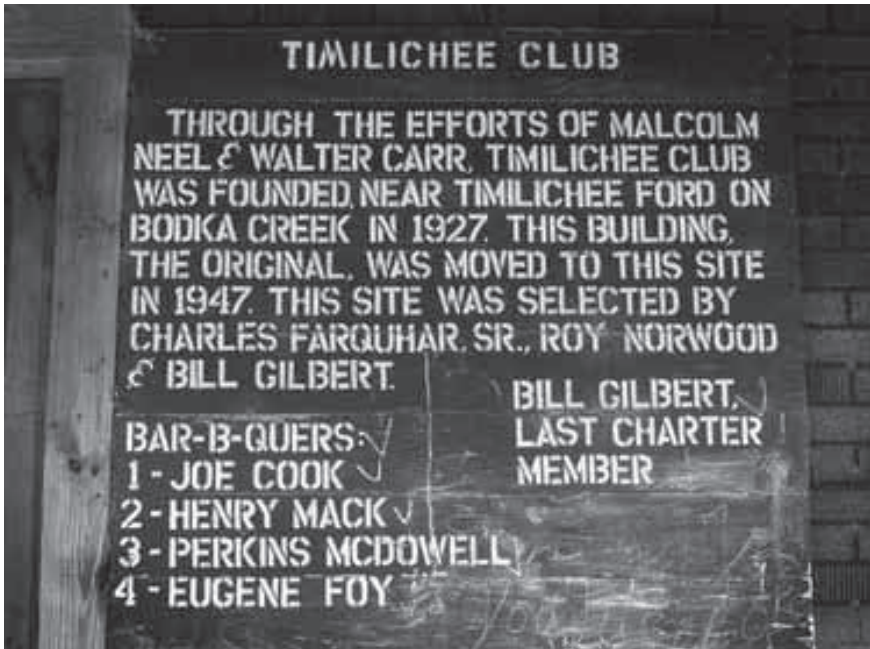


FIGURE 1

Sign at the Timilichee Club. (Photo by Dustin Prine)

and York, do not have clubs. Barbecue clubs are the domain of the smaller, mostly unincorporated communities. The founding of the Timilichee Barbecue Club in Geiger in 1927 formalized the barbecue club in Sumter County, and inaugurated the incorporation of clubs throughout the county. A countywide tradition was born.

Originally, the clubs smoked their own whole hogs. So many of the clubs' members owned their own farms that locating suitable hogs was not a problem. When members of the Panola community in northwest corner of Sumter County first began meeting in 1946, the only fee was a covered dish to accompany the barbecue. There was no charge for the barbecue pork because the host family, headed by R. C. Oliver, had hogs.¹⁰ According to Mildred Dial, a member of the Boyd Barbecue Club, "Everyone raised hogs [when the club was founded], and it was just natural to have barbecues back then."¹¹

The change from an agricultural economy of small subsistence farms to

the production of mainly timber, catfish, and cattle has had a direct impact on the Sumter County barbecue clubs. Today, only the Timilichee and Panola clubs smoke their own hogs. Availability is the main issue. According to Skip Boyd, a member of the Emelle Barbecue Club, the club cooked whole hogs on the pit behind the community center until 2008. Asked why they no longer cook their own meat, he explained, “Hogs are so hard to find right now, and the supplier we had been using for years no longer had them. We were having to go all the way into Mississippi just to pick up the hogs, and it just got too expensive.”¹²

When the clubs cooked their own meat, they always cooked over an open pit. Located behind the club houses, the pits were a permanent structure made of brick or cinder block, and most of the clubs’ pits had a shed roof. More than one club has a tale of their shed being burned down by someone associated with the club or who borrowed the club’s pit. The guilty parties range from a church that borrowed the Boyd Club’s pit to cook for homecoming, to the man the Cuba club hired to cook their meat. According to Chris Vaughan of the Cuba club, the hired cook “was in his own brand of sauce” the night he



FIGURE 2

Sign outside the Cuba Barbecue Club. (Photo by Dustin Prine)



FIGURE 3

The Timilichee pit. (Photo by Dustin Prine)

burned the pit to the ground.¹³ Needless to say, he was relieved of his duties.

The two clubs that still cook their own meat take the process very seriously. The furnace used at Timilichee would, according to a *Birmingham News* article, “inspire envy and awe in the casual barbecuer.” Club members outfitted a 1,000-gallon fuel tank with air vents, a suspended grate, and a swinging door to load wood and remove coals for the pit. They typically cook three hogs, weighing 150 to 200 pounds each. They begin on Thursday night so the pork will be ready for the Friday night meeting.¹⁴

Once the coals are ready, preparation at the Timilichee Club begins with cutting the head off the hog. Sonny Kuykendall, the oldest member of the Timilichee Club described the rest of the process by saying, “Then you split it down the back bone and spread it out on the pit stomach down.” The hogs are cooked all night over hickory wood.¹⁵ Chris Vaughan, a member of the Cuba Barbecue Club, described their smoking process, “We would build a hickory fire out under a shed, and then as the fire burned down, we put hot coals under the pork on the barbecue pit and covered the meat with tin so it



FIGURES 4-6
Cooking at the Timilichee Club.
(Photos by Dustin Prine)



would cook slowly. You would have to cook all night long to get the meat done just right.”¹⁶ And why do the clubs smoke their pork over hickory? According to Kuykendall, “Any wood that will produce a nut is good to cook with, but . . . hickory is the best.”¹⁷

The club house is where the preparation and eating take place. For many groups, the club house is also the community center. The building date of the Timilichee club house is not known, but it was disassembled and moved out of the swamp to its current location in 1947, and the tarpaper-covered building has been “patched on ever since.”¹⁸ The acre on which it sits was donated to the club. The Emelle Club meets in the Emelle Community Center. The club raised money in 1961 for a facility for the Methodists and Presbyterians to meet in, and the church holds the deed to the community center property. The Panola club meets in an old school in “downtown” Panola that was built by the National Youth Administration in 1940. When the building fell into disrepair after the school closed, the community purchased it for a community center. The Boyd Club House, located on the road to the Boyd Cemetery, was built in 1951 on land donated by the Dial family. The family also donated the lumber to build the structure. The Epes Club meets in an old wood schoolhouse near the town hall. The white frame building was built in the early 1900s. After the school closed in the 1940s, the town purchased the building for use as a community center. The town of Cuba had barbecues to raise money for the local school until it closed in 1974. A few years later, members of the community formed the club to keep the barbecues going. The club meets across the street from the school, which is now the town museum. The Sumterville Club meets in the community house, which was built in 1838 as a girls’ school. The community purchased the school when it closed in 1935.

At each club, when it is time to eat, host families gather at the community house to pull the meat, whether a whole hog cooked on-site, or a whole hog, butts, ribs, or shoulders cooked by someone else. The meat-pulling process is a large part of the tradition for many of the clubs, with different host families pulling the meat at each gathering. Members of all seven clubs stress that the meat is always pulled, never cut from the bone. At the August 2009 dinner of the Timilichee Club, a member commented that watching the pigs being lifted off of the pit, and watching members pull the meat from the bone was



FIGURES 7–9

(Clockwise from top left) Timilichee clubhouse, Epes school, and Boyd clubhouse.
(Photos by Dustin Prine)

what the barbecue clubs were all about. When one member asked Connie Duke, the current president, what the meat tasted like, she replied, “It tastes like Timilichee to me.”¹⁹ The fellowship of the pulling process is as important to the club as eating the meal. It is this fellowship that has become the life of these communities.

In Sumter County, it is understood that barbecue means smoked, pulled pork. There is no competition between the clubs about the meat, though the members of the Timilichee Club think theirs is the best since they smoke it themselves. If beef is served in Sumter County, it is in the form of a hamburger or a steak, and it is not on the table at a barbecue club gathering. While the meat is important to good barbecue, it is the sauce that distinguishes the clubs from one another. And there is more than a mild loyalty on the part of club members to their particular sauce. Around the South in general, sauces vary by region. The sauces of western North Carolina use a heavier ketchup base,



FIGURES 10–12

(Clockwise from top left) Pulling meat at the Epes club; Bud Williams with sauce; the Epes serving line. (Photos by Dustin Prine)



as opposed to a vinegar or mustard base found in the sauces in South Carolina. A large number of the early settlers of Sumter County came from North Carolina, and proof of this settlement pattern is evident today in the fact that all of the sauces in Sumter County are tomato-based. The Taylor family, who came from North Carolina, was one of the first families to settle the Panola area. Billy Taylor, a descendant, developed the Panola Club's sauce.²⁰ While the club's sauces may vary by spiciness or sweetness, no mustard- or vinegar-based sauces are found among the seven barbecue clubs of Sumter County.

Members of each club can still recall who developed their sauce, though some clubs have modified their sauce through the years. Because the population in these areas is dwindling as the small hamlets slowly die, it has become necessary to open membership to those outside of the communities, and some people are members of more than one barbecue club. This cross-membership has led to the blending of sauce recipes between a few of the clubs. But the majority of the clubs are still loyal to their original sauce, and they guard the recipe closely. For those who do not like spicy sauce, several clubs have developed mild versions. Epes Barbecue Club is one such group. Members bring their own trays to the serving table. The food line begins with a large spoonful of pulled smoked pork shoveled onto each tray. Mild sauce is set up on one side of the serving table, and the regular is on the other. The sauce is then ladled onto the pork from the three-gallon cooking pot where it has been simmering for hours. The sauce servers are careful not to put their ladles in the incorrect pots so they will not contaminate the sauces. After a long walk down a table packed with homemade salads, breads, casseroles, and desserts, the members hand their large drink tumblers to the tea servers. Tea is dipped from ten-gallon galvanized tubs full of sweet or unsweet iced tea.²¹

Along with a sense of community, many traditional gender roles exist in the clubs as well. These are evident in the preparation and serving of food, and the navigation of the serving line. In many of the clubs, including Emelle and Panola, the men are in charge of cooking and pulling the meat, while women prepare the rest of the food and coordinate the serving line. In the Epes Club, the men serve the meat and the sauce, while the women serve the tea. In the Boyd Club, the men go down one side of the table, while the women and children go down the other side. Because the men are in charge of cooking

and serving the meat, they are also in charge of preparing the “secret” barbecue sauce for each club. Until 2000, the men in the Timilichee Club had a stag night with “a little gambling, a little poker playing, a little blackjack, a little shooting craps, ’til somebody got mad and threw the table in the creek.”²² Both the Timilichee and Epes clubs got their start from men’s hunting clubs.

While all of the clubs exist to bring their respective communities together, becoming a member of most of the clubs requires some type of invitation. The exception is the club at Panola which exists for the sole purpose of raising money for the Panola United Methodist Church. Panola had their first fund-raising barbecue in 1950 to raise money for new Sunday School classrooms. The only “members” of the club are the church members who host the barbecue. This club is what keeps the church alive. Originally twenty-four families hosted the barbecue. Because the church membership has declined over the years, there are now only eight families in charge of the barbecue. They sell five hundred tickets each year. Though an interested barbecue fan does not have to have an invitation to attend the Panola dinner, the tickets are almost as hard to come by as an invitation to join one of the other clubs.



FIGURE 13

Panola school and clubhouse. (Photo by Dustin Prine)

Changes in American society have impacted the barbecue clubs drastically since their founding. Mildred Dial, a member of the Boyd Club, addressed the revolutionary changes that have taken place in the last sixty years in entertainment, communication, and transportation and how these developments have impacted the clubs. She noted that, “When we started the barbecues, we did not have televisions and telephones, and it was just a good time to get together. Young people today have so many other things to do, and it just isn’t as much fun for them as it was when we were young.”²³

Maintaining a sense of community, and the ties to tradition, are what keep the clubs going and keeps the sense of community alive, even as the rural population declines. To keep the sauce flowing, many clubs now accept members from outside the local community. Boyd and Epes have members from around the county. Interest in joining has to be expressed to a current member, who then offers that person for membership. According to the oldest member of the Timilichee Club, “When I got in the club one ‘no’ vote would keep you out. Now it is three ‘no’ votes. One time, we got a bunch of liberals



FIGURE 14

Emelle Club members. (Photo by Dustin Prine)



FIGURE 15

Sumterville clubhouse with members, (Photo by Dustin Prine)

in the club and they raised it to eight ‘no’ votes, but now it is back to three.”²⁴ The Sumterville Club, the youngest club, was started in 2001 by members of other clubs who wanted a barbecue club closer to home. The club in Cuba accepts members from Cuba, Ward, and York. The members of the Panola Club are the members of the local Methodist Church. The Emelle Club is the most exclusive. All twenty-four members “live in Emelle, work in Emelle, or were raised in Emelle.”²⁵

Though membership dues range from \$100 to \$200 in the various clubs, the members feel it is money well spent. The food and the fellowship are what is important. Sandra Kuykendall, the wife of the oldest member of the Timilichee Club, stated, "It's a lot of work. It's not cheap to be in a barbecue club, but it is worth all of the effort to see the community come together."²⁶ Commenting on the importance of the clubs to the community, and revealing generational differences between the older, more settled members of the community and the younger, more mobile members of the community, Gump Ozment, a member of the Sumterville Club, remarked, "In the country, the only time you see folks is when you go to church, go to a funeral, or go to a barbecue club."²⁷ ■

Notes

All interviews were conducted in July and August of 2009 by Pamela Conner McAlpine, under the direction of the Center for the Study of the Black Belt at the University of West Alabama in Livingston, Alabama. Unless otherwise noted, photos were taken by Dustin Prine of the University of West Alabama. All interviews are on file at the Center for the Study of the Black Belt at the University of West Alabama, and with the Alabama Folklife Association, which sponsored the study.

1. Abernethy, Thomas Perkins. *The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815–1828* (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1965), p. 162.
2. Jordan, Weymouth. *T. Hugh Davis and His Alabama Plantation* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1948), p. 19.
3. Works Progress Administration (WPA) "Slave Narratives" at the Library of Congress. Recorded in 1937. Many of the interviews conducted in Alabama mention hog killing and the celebration that followed. See <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html> to access the documents online.
4. Trowbridge, J. T. *The South: A Tour of Its Battle-Fields and Ruined Cities, A Journey Through the Desolated States, and Talks with the People* (Hartford, Connecticut: L. Stebbins, 1886), p. 437.
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6. WPA Slave Narratives, "Interview of Simon Walker, Ex-Slave," recorded by Ira S. Jordan. Library of Congress, p. 405. http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?mesnbib:186:./temp/~ammem_Tx6k::
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8. Abernethy, p. 19.
9. Read, William Alexander, and James B. McMillan. *Indian Place Names in Alabama* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press), p. 61.

10. Interview of Bertha Rittenberry of the Panola Barbecue Club, July 2009.
11. Interview of Mildred Dial of the Boyd Barbecue Club, August 2009.
12. Interview of Skip Boyd of the Emelle Barbecue Club, July 2009.
13. Interview of Chris Vaughan of the Cuba Barbecue Club, July 14, 2009.
14. Thomas Spencer, "Barbecue clubs kindle a savory rural tradition," *Birmingham News*, April 18, 2008, p. 1A.
15. Interview of Sonny Kuykendall of the Timilichee Barbecue Club, July 13, 2009.
16. Interview of Chris Vaughan of the Cuba Barbecue Club, July 14, 2009.
17. Sonny Kuykendall, July 13, 2009.
18. Sonny Kuykendall, July 13, 2009.
19. Interview by Pamela Conner McAlpine at the Timilichee Barbecue Club dinner, August 2009.
20. Rittenberry, July 2009.
21. Information from the author's attendance at an Epes Barbecue Club Dinner in September 2009.
22. Sonny Kuykendall, July 13, 2009.
23. Interview of Mildred Dial of the Boyd Barbecue Club, August 2009.
24. Sonny Kuykendall, July 13, 2009.
25. Interview of Lolita Smith of the Emelle Barbecue Club, July 2009.
26. Interview of Sandra Kuykendall of the Timilichee Barbecue Club, July 13, 2009.
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‘This Dark, Rich Savory Bowl of Wonderfulness’: Gumbo Traditions along the Gulf Coast

Susan Thomas

The Alabama Gulf Coast is known for its historic diversity, having been settled by colonists from France, England and Spain; slaves from Africa; and displaced Creoles from Saint-Domingue in the Caribbean, all of whom intermingled with the local Native American tribes, including the Mobilians, the Grand Tomech and the Little Tomech. This subsequent melding of European, African, Caribbean, and Native cultures produced a culinary style distinctive and set apart from the rest of the state.¹

Perhaps no other dish symbolizes this rich and varied cuisine better than seafood gumbo. Combining okra originally brought to the South by African slaves, tomatoes introduced by the Spaniards, filé powder derived from sassafras leaves pounded by Native Americans, hot peppers brought over from the Caribbean, and a rich gravy-like roux contributed by the French, early Gulf Coast cooks created a thick, savory broth into which they added coastal seafood—shrimp, crab, oysters, and occasionally crawfish. Called “gumbo”—a word derived from an African name for okra—the dish has been a popular staple in Gulf Coast kitchens for generations.²

Preparing a true gumbo is a labor-intensive, time-consuming process, requiring hours of chopping and sautéing vegetables, simmering stock, cleaning seafood, and slow-cooking the flour-oil base known as roux. Many cooks who prepare gumbo do so without a written recipe; directions are often handed down from one generation to another. The tedious steps of preparation, the high cost of seafood, and the dependence on oral history to pass on gumbo knowledge have resulted in fewer people mastering the craft.³ Most coastal residents today are content with ordering their gumbo from a restaurant.

Despite these hurdles many cooks in Mobile and the surrounding Gulf Coast still prepare gumbo from scratch. As a rule, individuals who routinely make gumbo feel passionately about their recipes, cooking techniques and their finished product. Since the nature of gumbo makes it almost impossible to prepare a small batch, gumbo tends to be a communal food, cooked to be shared with friends, relatives, and even the community. Cooks who master the art become known in their social circles for their gumbo.

A recent project of the Alabama Folklife Association (AFA) involved interviewing Gulf Coast residents about their gumbo traditions.⁴ Six individuals representing a wide array of occupational, geographical, and socioeconomic backgrounds were asked to share their experiences with learning to cook gumbo, their specific preparation techniques, and the role gumbo has played in their family routines and rituals. Most of those interviewed also have made gumbo for community fund-raising events or for large social gatherings; they shared these traditions as well.

Although the six cooks agreed on the basics of gumbo preparation—the necessity of using fresh, local seafood and the importance of cooking the roux slowly, for example—they disagreed on many of the particulars of creating a distinctive gumbo. Many have their own “secret” ingredients or specific cooking techniques that make their gumbo unique. All agree, however, on the significance homemade gumbo holds in their family traditions. Gumbo—“this dark, rich savory bowl of wonderfulness,” as described by one individual⁵—is a dish that conveys family ties and community.

The six persons interviewed for the Alabama Folklife project are well-known among their friends and colleagues for their gumbo-making talents. Bettie Champion, a Mobile native who lives part of the year on Dauphin Island, cooks gumbo for her church’s annual bazaar. Margie Delcambre, who lives full-time at Dauphin Island along with her husband, a commercial shrimper, regularly participates in—and wins—her church’s gumbo cook-off. Billy Pappas, a native Mobilian who is the grandson of Greek immigrants, is a Mobile assistant fire chief who prepares gumbo for local charity events. Judith Adams and her mother, Ronni Clark, both originally from Louisiana, regularly prepare large batches of gumbo for family holiday gatherings; Judith also heads up an annual gumbo-cooking contest for Mobile’s maritime industry. Dora Finley, a com-



FIGURE 1

Typical vegetables used in Bettie Champion's gumbo. (Photo by Gil Champion)

munity activist and part-time college instructor involved in Mobile's African American Heritage Trail, is known for the gumbo she serves at her Mardi Gras parties. All six of these individuals are proud of their gumbo recipes and the role gumbo has played in their family, church, and community activities.

Most of the interviewees initially learned to make gumbo from relatives, learning specific ingredients or cooking techniques passed down through several generations. Judith Adams and her mother, Ronni Clark, learned to make gumbo from Judith's grandmother and aunt, who were originally from southwest Alabama. They were also taught by other Louisiana relatives as well as the African American cooks employed by these families. Ronni and Judith's gumbo recipes reflect a melding of Creole, Cajun, African American, and rural south Alabama cuisine.

Dora Finley learned to cook gumbo by observing her grandmother, who made the dish every year for Mardi Gras parties. Dora stated she got the foundation for her current gumbo recipe from her grandmother, but that she has

changed it to suit her own tastes through the years, calling her gumbo “an expression of me.”⁶ Billy Pappas likewise was initiated into the art of gumbo-making at a young age, watching his mother and grandmother make “humongous” pots of gumbo that the family would eat for “days and days.”⁷ Billy’s mother grew up in rural Georgia and moved to Mobile where she met and married Billy’s father, the son of a Greek immigrant. Billy’s culinary background combined his mother’s use of fresh, homegrown vegetables and his father’s use of Greek seasonings with a liberal amount of coastal seafood favored by both sides of the family. He made his first batch of gumbo as a teenager.

Bettie Champion also learned to make gumbo by observing her mother; “I have my mother’s gumbo recipe and I would not change a thing,”⁸ she said. However, she did not try to make gumbo on her own until she was an adult. She made her first batch after obtaining her mother’s recipe over the telephone, scribbling down vague instructions and imprecise measurements on a scrap of paper. She has since refined the recipe to include more specific amounts of ingredients, but, overall, she has not changed it significantly.

Margie Delcambre did not recall the first time she made gumbo—“It’s been so many years ago!” she exclaimed—but believes it was shortly after she got married and moved to Dauphin Island. She does, however, remember her mother making gumbo although at the time she did not actively try to learn how from watching her. Margie also recalled first learning about roux in an Alabama history book. Making gumbo “kind of grew on me,” she stated. Since her husband has always shrimped for a living she has always had an abundance of fresh seafood to “inspire” her to cook gumbo.⁹

Although there were some disagreements between the six cooks regarding ingredients in gumbo—the use of sausage, tomatoes, filé powder and hot sauce are all controversial, for example—all agreed on the basic cooking techniques necessary to make a good gumbo. First, they said, is the importance of slow-cooking the roux, being careful to brown it sufficiently without letting it burn. The roux is a mixture of flour and oil, usually in equal parts, that is browned very slowly in a heavy pot or iron skillet. Most of the cooks agreed the type of oil is not significant, although Billy pointed out that peanut oil is less likely to burn. Margie stated she uses canola or peanut oil. Ronni said she has used every type of oil, even olive oil, in her roux; Judith puts a small amount of

bacon grease in with her oil to give her gumbo more flavor.

Once the oil and flour are whisked together over a high heat, the resulting roux is cooked until a desired color is reached. The cooking times for the roux preferred by the cooks varied between twenty-five and sixty minutes, with a darker roux requiring a longer cooking time. Bettie stated she puts a chair by the stove and sits by the roux, stirring it constantly. Billy said he knows when



FIGURE 2

John Adams, participant on a team in the 2010 Dauphin Island Gumbo Cook-Off, stirs 20 gallons of gumbo. (Photo by Susan Thomas)

his roux has finished cooking by its scent—the aroma will change as the roux caramelizes. Dora noted she cooks her roux until it is the color of her skin; then she knows it is done. Both Bettie and Ronni admitted to adding a drop of Kitchen Bouquet seasoning to make their roux darker if needed. Margie summarized, “The secret to a good pot of gumbo is the roux.”

After the roux is cooked it is combined with chopped vegetables and a stock or broth mixture. The specific vegetables used, the source of the broth, and the order in which the blending of the ingredients occurs were subject to debate among the cooks. Billy stated that when his roux has cooked sufficiently, he will stop further cooking by adding his chopped-up vegetables. He stirs half of the vegetables into the roux vigorously and notes that the roux can burn even after the fire is turned off. While stirring in the vegetables he will have his stock simmering; after the vegetables and roux are blended he transfers the mixture to the stock pot and adds the remainder of his chopped vegetables. Both Judith and Bettie cook their vegetables in the roux; Judith sautés them until they are translucent and then adds her stock slowly to the roux and vegetable mixture; Bettie states she cooks her vegetables slowly in the roux and then transfers the mixture to the stock pot.

Margie and Dora, however, cook their vegetables separately from the roux. When Margie’s vegetables are sufficiently cooked, she adds them to her roux. Dora sautés her vegetables and then adds them directly to the stock.

All the cooks use chopped celery, onion, and bell peppers, which several referred to as the “holy trinity” of cooking gumbo. All add okra as well to help thicken the gumbo. “It’s not gumbo without okra,” Margie stated. She added that it was necessary to “sauté it down until you get the slime out.” Ronni agreed that okra needed to be cooked long enough that it was no longer “slimy.” There was disagreement among the cooks regarding the use of tomatoes in gumbo. Some only use fresh tomatoes, some prefer an imported Italian brand of boxed tomatoes, and Dora stated that she does not use tomatoes at all in her gumbo. Margie feels that tomatoes add to the color and flavor of the gumbo, but if she doesn’t have them, she will do without. Bettie prefers using home-canned tomatoes when they are available.¹⁰

The stock used as the base of the gumbo varies from cook to cook. Dora’s stock recipe was the most unusual; she cuts up a whole boneless roast, along



FIGURE 3

Bettie Champion adds onions and peppers to roux. (Photo by Susan Thomas)

with two hens, all of which she then browns, covers with water, and simmers along with a combination of garlic, celery, and green pepper. She refrigerates the stock overnight, then skims off the fat, and discards the bones and chicken skin. “I don’t like trash gumbo,” she stated, “I want you to be able to eat it easily.”

Billy prefers to make his stock from chickens, turkeys, or even ducks that he has smoked himself. He picks the meat off the bones, and then simmers the remaining carcasses slowly, at the same time his roux is cooking. Billy admitted that stock made with seafood shells adds “a complexity of flavors” to the gumbo, but cooking the seafood-based stock “stinks the house up.” He therefore usually sticks with a poultry-based stock.

Ronni, on the other hand, typically makes her stock from boiled crab carcasses and even crawfish bodies. She carefully digs the meat out of the shells and freezes the stock to be used later. Judith also prefers using seafood shells in her

stock, but when they are not available she uses a chicken stock. Judith stressed the importance of heating the stock before blending it with the roux.

Margie, however, does not feel it is necessary to heat up the stock before mixing it with the other gumbo ingredients. She often makes her stock ahead and freezes it. She always makes her stock from whole chickens and never uses seafood carcasses or shells. Bettie stated she “uses everything” in her stock—boiled or roasted chickens, canned chicken broth, water from boiling shrimp or shrimp heads—whatever she has on hand and in any combination.

All the cooks emphasized the importance of letting the stock, roux, and vegetable mixture simmer slowly, often for hours, to get a good blend of flavors. “You cook it slowly for a long period of time, tasting it as you go, making adjustments,” Billy stated.

While the stock simmers, seasonings are added and adjusted. The cooks differed on what seasonings they typically add to their gumbo. All except Bettie use garlic; all except Margie add thyme; only Billy and Ronni use basil. Several prefer commercially made seasoning mixtures: Margie often uses Nature’s Seasons Seasoning Blend, Tony Chachere’s Creole Seasoning, or Old Bay Seasoning; Dora also uses Old Bay. Some of the cooks had special seasonings that they felt added to the taste of their gumbos. Billy uses sea salt instead of table salt; Ronni often uses ground bay leaves, available from an imported food store; and Bettie uses turmeric. “I think turmeric was my mom’s secret ingredient,” she said. “It must add some kind of flavor that I’ve never found in anyone else’s gumbo.”

All the cooks use a combination of ground peppers—black, red, and sometimes white. Some add hot sauce to the cooking stock mixture, but others prefer to serve hot sauce on the side. Dora feels hot sauce drowns out the taste of the gumbo. Judith and Billy, on the other hand, always add Tabasco sauce to their stocks. “Tabasco for cooking; Crystal sauce for the table—that’s my mantra,” Judith explained.

The use of *filé*—a seasoning made of ground-up leaves of the sassafras tree, originally introduced by Native Americans along the coast—was debatable among the six cooks. Margie sprinkles *filé* on top of her gumbo when she is ready to serve it; Dora and Ronni serve it on the side. Judith emphatically said, “I don’t do *filé*!” Both Judith and Ronni feel that *filé* is used more extensively



FIGURE 4

A completed bowl of seafood gumbo. (Photo by Gil Champion)

in Louisiana than in Alabama and may be a distinguishing characteristic between the two locale's gumbos. Several cooks indicated filé has to be used with caution. Gumbo which has had filé added to it cannot be reheated very well as the heat makes the filé turn "stringy," according to Ronni. Dora stated that she had heard it said that putting filé directly into a pot of gumbo "can make it spoil."¹¹

All the cooks emphasized the importance of tasting and adjusting the seasonings as the broth cooks down. Ronni and Judith explained that the recipes they use are so indefinite that the amounts of seasonings can vary according to the other ingredients used and the amount of gumbo prepared. Judith warned it was easy to put in too much salt or too much thyme. After the seasonings are added, the broth should simmer for a long time—as long as a day, according to Judith.

Only after the broth has simmered for hours with its mixture of roux,

stock, vegetables, and seasonings, is the seafood added to the pot, stated all six cooks. All agreed that the seafood should be fresh and local; all buy their seafood from shops in Mobile or along the coast. Margie's husband is a commercial shrimper so she obtains her shrimp directly from his boat. Both Billy and Bettie recalled their mothers catching crabs to use in gumbo, but now they typically buy all of their seafood.

All six cooks use shrimp and crabmeat in their gumbo. The only consideration regarding shrimp was that the shrimp be fresh and obtained locally. The use of crabmeat was more controversial. Several of the cooks prefer using whole crabs in their gumbo. Dora, for example, buys live crabs that she kills herself and then breaks into quarters, adding the pieces to her stock. She thinks lump crabmeat "gets lost" in the completed gumbo. She also occasionally uses crab claws or "fingers," because "they are easy to eat—you pull it [the crabmeat] off and you're done," she stated. Bettie and Margie use crab claws occasionally; Margie stated when she makes gumbo for a competition she typically uses the claws to add to the presentation. Generally, though, they use crabmeat already picked from the shells. Ronni prefers using whole crab claws, because she feels, like Dora, that the milder lump crabmeat gets "lost" in the gumbo due to its milder flavor.

Judith disagreed with her mother on lump crabmeat. She said she is a "purist" and she prefers there be no shells of any kind in her gumbo. She stated that if you add the lump crabmeat in the last ten minutes of cooking the flavor does not get lost. Billy also tends to only use crab claw meat already picked from the shells, or, occasionally, the more expensive white crabmeat. When using crab bodies or claws, the cooks tended to add them earlier on in the cooking process, whereas lump or claw meat would be added in the last few minutes of cooking.

Most of the cooks use fresh oysters in their gumbo, although Margie and Billy do not. Margie omits oysters because her husband does not eat them; Billy feels like the flavor of the oysters "sort of disappears into thin air" so he thinks they are not needed.

The use of crawfish in gumbo was also a subject of debate. Margie, Dora, and Bettie never use crawfish; Judith occasionally uses crawfish tails if they are local; and Billy will use crawfish if he has them, but generally prefers to put



FIGURE 5

Bettie Champion demonstrates cleaning blue crabs to add to her gumbo. (Photo by Gil Champion)

crawfish in other dishes such as *étouffée*.

Besides seafood, some cooks will add meats such as turkey, chicken, or sausage to their gumbos. Many use a turkey or chicken carcass left from holiday dinners to make stock for gumbo, to which they may or may not add seafood. Ronni often uses chicken, duck and even quail in gumbo; however, she feels using anything other than seafood in a gumbo is a waste of time; why go to so much trouble if you don't include seafood, she asked.

Sausage was another controversial addition to gumbo. Only Ronni and Dora routinely use sausage; both prefer Alabama-produced Conecuh Sausage available in local grocery stores. Judith feels the addition of sausage to gumbo makes it too greasy. She stated she "adores a pure, seafood gumbo"; her gumbo is made of coastal seafood and nothing else. Billy agreed that sausage is "unnecessary" for the flavor of a seafood gumbo, although he does use it in poultry-based gumbos. Bettie also finds the addition of sausage overpowering to the gumbo.

The cooks all agreed that seafood—particularly the shrimp and oysters—should be added to the gumbo right before serving. Judith stated, “The secret is to never add your seafood until you’re ready to serve.” Shrimp should only be cooked a few minutes and oysters “just until they curl,” she added.

All except Judith serve their gumbo with rice. Some put a small amount of rice in a bowl and then pour the gumbo over it; others spoon a scoop of rice on top of an individual bowl of gumbo. Others leave the rice on the side and let guests decide how to mix it. Some garnish the serving of gumbo with fresh green onions or parsley on top. All the cooks generally serve gumbo as a main dish, although Billy stated he often serves it as an appetizer for a holiday meal such as Thanksgiving to “stretch the meal out.”

Side dishes served with gumbo vary. Several cooks serve saltine crackers; others serve hush puppies, garlic bread, green salad, or French bread. Dora feels it is important to serve gumbo in an appropriate dish. She uses individual serving bowls that are shallow so that “you can see what’s in it.” And, even though she serves gumbo to large crowds, she always uses “real” soup spoons and bowls—no plastic or styrofoam.

Each cook had specific family traditions associated with the serving of gumbo. All typically prepare it for special holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Mardi Gras. In addition to holidays, Margie prepares gumbo for visitors to Dauphin Island’s annual Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo. Bettie, however, said gumbo is no longer a special-occasion dish in her household, as she makes it so frequently she always has a batch in her freezer. She tends to serve it whenever her children are in town and they get together for a meal.

All the cooks agreed that making gumbo is no simple feat. Preparing a batch requires an investment of time and money. Most start days in advance preparing their stock. Cooking a roux takes patience as well as skill. Judith stated she understood why most people no longer typically prepare gumbo at home. “No one is going to put [in] that kind of time today, in our instant society,” she stated. The cost, too, can be prohibitive. Dora stated that her typical batch of gumbo—using ten to fifteen pounds of shrimp, a quart of oysters, and one and a half dozen whole crabs—represents a “serious monetary investment.”

The cooks stated they understood why people generally chose to buy their gumbo from restaurants instead of putting forth the effort required to make

their own. However, all agreed that the gumbo served in restaurants generally was not up to their standards. Bettie said she had tried gumbo at several establishments but could never find any she really liked, “so I finally just quit ordering it.” Billy also stated that he was usually “too disappointed” in the gumbo he purchased out locally, although he does have some favorite eateries in New Orleans that he feels prepare it correctly. Dora has found ordering



FIGURE 6

Dora Finley serves gumbo at a Mobile Mardi Gras. (Photo by Emily Blejwas)

gumbo at local restaurants “an exercise in futility”; she too has located a single restaurant that she feels makes good gumbo and it is in New Orleans. Margie has one particular local restaurant from which she will order gumbo, but generally she finds restaurant gumbo “unfit to eat.” Ronni and Judith both have a few favorite local establishments where they will go for gumbo, but they feel their homemade versions are superior.

Most of the interviewees have used their gumbo-preparation skills to assist in community endeavors. Since most gumbo recipes produce a large amount—“I can never make a little gumbo; I can only make a lot!” Dora stated—it is a natural dish to prepare and serve to crowds. Often along the coast, churches, schools, and other nonprofit groups will use gumbo as a means to raise funds. During the past few years, for example, three gumbo cook-offs have been inaugurated in the Mobile area: the Alabama Gulf Coast Chapter of the Red Cross has sponsored a gumbo cook-off in downtown Mobile since 2009; a group of Dauphin Island residents and businesses started a similar cook-off in 2010; and an organization of medical school students at the University of South Alabama initiated their own gumbo and chili cook-off to raise funds for scholarships two years ago. Another event, the Taste of the Bayou held annually in the coastal town of Bayou la Batre, also features gumbo prominently in its competition among local businesses and restaurants. All these events have proved popular in the community and have brought forth an array of different gumbo recipes.

Bettie has used her gumbo-making skills at her church, Government Street United Methodist in Mobile. Bettie works as church secretary and has been a member of the congregation since she was a child. When she was growing up the church was known for its gumbo sales; however, as the women who made the gumbo got too old to cook, the tradition died off. Two years ago Bettie volunteered to revive the tradition as a means for the church to raise funds. Since she was already making gumbo regularly for her family, she began doubling her batches and freezing them in quart containers to use at the first fund-raiser, which was a gumbo dinner featuring a gospel choir performance. The event was deemed a success, so Bettie continued to make and freeze extra gumbo throughout the year. It has since been sold at several church bazaars and yard sales. The cooking process has become easy for her, since, she said,



FIGURE 7

Judith Adams serves samples of her gumbo at the 2009 Alabama Folklife Association meeting in Montgomery, Alabama. (Photo by Susan Thomas)

“I’ve done it so often and I do it in such large quantities.”

Margie also uses her gumbo-making skills to assist her church. For the past six years Dauphin Island United Methodist has sponsored Christmas by the Sea, a fund-raiser held the first Saturday in December, featuring a gumbo competition along with other activities. A panel of judges from outside the church evaluates the gumbo entries and awards prizes. Margie has won first place twice. She explained that she won the first year of the competition, but that she had not planned on entering it the second year. However, due to a shortage of participants, she entered and again won first place. During the competition people attending the event can either buy a bowl of gumbo to eat on-site, or they can purchase a quart to take home. In recent years due to the downturn in the economy, the event has drawn fewer participants than in the past, but is still popular with gumbo enthusiasts.

Judith has been involved for several years with an annual gumbo cook-off sponsored by the Propeller Club, a nonprofit association that supports activities of the maritime industry in Mobile. Her employer, the Alabama State Port

Authority, typically sponsors several teams in the event. The first year Judith was asked to head a team, she had never prepared gumbo for a large crowd. Although the event is technically not opened to the public, it typically draws at least two hundred people from the Mobile maritime community. Judith cooked thirty gallons on-site, and although her gumbo did not win the competition, she stated that “every bit was eaten.” She has since participated in the event annually.¹²

Although Dora does not typically prepare gumbo for fund-raising events, she cooks it every year during Mardi Gras for the large groups of friends and relatives who come to her house to view the Mardi Gras parades. Since Dora lives in a historic area of downtown Mobile directly on the parade route, she gets many visitors during the season. She has become well-known for her gumbo, often preparing fifteen to twenty gallons at a time. A documentary on Mobile Mardi Gras, *The Order of Myths*, includes a segment showing Dora preparing gumbo for a Mardi Gras debutante party.

Billy has prepared gumbo for fundraisers throughout the years, although he has never participated in any of the area’s numerous gumbo cook-offs. He has cooked for Helping Hands for Children, a charity that raises money for children’s medical needs, as well as for many fund-raisers associated with the Mobile Fire and Rescue Department. He has also hosted legendary parties for which he cooked large pots of gumbo on-site. He also makes gumbo for family reunions.

All the cooks acknowledge that preparing gumbo from scratch is perhaps a dying art along the Gulf Coast.¹³ Through their participation in gumbo-cooking community events as well as by passing their recipes and cooking techniques on to their children they hope to keep the tradition alive. Billy is already teaching his nine-year-old daughter the rudiments of cooking, and his younger son already likes to stir and taste the dishes Billy prepares. Bettie has passed on her mother’s gumbo recipe to her daughter, who is becoming a skilled gumbo cook in her own right. Margie taught her son to make gumbo as an adult; he asked to learn how so he could prepare it for his own church’s fund-raiser. His first batch made for the church was “excellent,” Margie stated. She has also taught her oldest daughter to prepare it. Dora stated her daughter, a scientist living in New Jersey, has not shown much interest in cooking, but



FIGURE 8

Roux simmering with the “holy trinity” of vegetables—onion, celery, and bell pepper. (Photo by Gil Champion)

she hopes one day to pass on her gumbo-making skills to her.

The six cooks’ willingness to share their gumbo recipes with the public vary. Bettie has recently published her mother’s gumbo recipe, which she has closely adopted, in her church bulletin, since so many people had asked her for it. Judith and Ronni had never written down their recipes, but Judith agreed to formalize hers for a recent traditional foods cooking demonstration at an Alabama Folklife Association meeting. She computed the amounts of ingredients that she typically uses and compiled a recipe that she distributed to attendees of the event. Billy willingly discussed his gumbo preparation techniques, but said he has never followed or compiled a written recipe. Dora was hesitant to share all the particulars of her recipe, which is not written down or formalized. She stated her gumbo was “an expression of me,” and, regarding the recipe, told the interviewer, “I’m not going to tell you *everything!*”

When Margie was interviewed for the AFA project, she had made an effort beforehand to jot down the usual ingredients in her gumbo, but like the others, she had no formalized recipe. She stated that people have often asked her for a recipe, but, she usually tells them, “Come over to my house and we will make a pot of gumbo together.” She explained that to learn to make gumbo, a person needed to watch it being done and to take notes—because making gumbo was more than just “going by a recipe.” She then summarized, “It’s more of a cultural-type food.” ■

Notes

- ¹For more discussion on the intermingling of culinary traditions of early Native Americans, African slaves, and European settlers, refer to Waverly Root and Richard de Rochemont’s *Eating In America: A History* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1976), 38–39; Jessica B. Harris’s “Three is a Magic Number,” *The Southern Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 2: Winter 2007, 9–15; and Sheila Ferguson’s *Soul Food: Classic Cuisine from the Deep South* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), vii–xxi.
- ²The word for okra is derived from *ngombo* or *kingombo*, which either originated in Angola (see Ferguson, xxiii) or from the Bantu language (see Harris, 14).
- ³David Holloway, Food Editor of the *Mobile Press-Register*, says of gumbo: “Gumbo, by its very nature, can be a fickle, unforgiving dish. It often changes to fit the whims of the cook and what is available in the market at any given time. . . [recipes for gumbo] are vague and unfulfilling” (see “Gumbo Cookoff Set for April 10,” *Mobile Press-Register*, 13 March 2010).
- ⁴Gumbo was one of the four regional food items featured at the Alabama Folklife Association’s annual gathering November 7, 2009, held in Montgomery. See www.alabamafolklife.org for gathering details and photographs.
- ⁵Judith Adams, interview by the author, Mobile, Alabama, 9 July 2009; all subsequent quotations in this article by Judith Adams or her mother, Ronni Clark, are from this interview.
- ⁶Dora Finley, interview by the author, Mobile, Alabama, 23 July 2009; all subsequent quotations in this article by Dora Finley are from this interview.
- ⁷Billy Pappas, interview by the author, Mobile, Alabama, 13 August 2009; all subsequent quotations in this article by Billy Pappas are from this interview.
- ⁸Bettie Champion, interview by the author, Mobile, Alabama, 18 June 2009; all subsequent quotations in this article by Bettie Champion are from this interview.
- ⁹Margie Delcambre, interview by the author, Dauphin Island, Alabama, 16 August 2009; all subsequent quotations in this article by Margie Delcambre are from this interview.

- ¹⁰The use of tomatoes in gumbo is often attributed to the influence of the French Acadians who settled along the Louisiana coast in the late 1700s. Their culinary style, combined with that of the local Indians, Spanish settlers, and African slaves produced what became known as Creole cuisine (see Root and de Rochemont, 281–83).
- ¹¹Root and de Rochemont attribute the grinding of sassafras leaves into the powder known as filé to the Choctaw Indians. About filé they write that it “is added to the gumbo only after all boiling has stopped” (282). For a detailed discussion of how sassafras leaves are pulverized into filé, see Eugene Walter’s *American Cooking: Southern Style* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1971), 140–41.
- ¹²Judith Adams also formed a team to participate in the second annual Dauphin Island Gumbo Cook-Off held on March 26, 2011.
- ¹³Attempts are being made to ensure that gumbo remains a viable culinary staple on the Gulf Coast. For example, “100 Dishes to Eat in Alabama Before You Die” (alabama.travel/media/media_room/Brochure/100Dishes_Brochure2010.pdf), a promotional brochure published by the state in 2005 to commemorate “The Year of Alabama Food,” lists several Gulf Coast seafood restaurants that specialize in gumbo; a recent pamphlet published by the Mobile Bay Convention and Visitor’s Bureau includes a gumbo recipe by Mobile chef Vince Henderson as the “official soup” of Mobile; most local restaurants feature gumbo on their menus. In 2011 Bettie Champion was awarded a grant by the Alabama State Council on the Arts to conduct a “Gumbo Academy” to teach her gumbo-making skills to the community. The classes have been well-attended. The late, colorful Mobile writer Eugene Walter was a passionate advocate of the dish, stating in his oral autobiography (edited by Katherine Clark), *Milking the Moon*, “Sooner or later Southerners all come home, not to die, but to eat gumbo” (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001), 266.

Sweet Potato Pie: Civil Rights and Soul Food in Montgomery

Emily Blejwas

In Alabama, sweet potato pie emerged as a blend of European custom, African technique, Southern environment, and colonial culture. But Alabama's sweet potato pie developed a distinct identity through the lives of Georgia Gilmore and Martha Hawkins, two African American women in Montgomery who infused sweet potato pie with new meaning and singular purpose. In Alabama, sweet potato pie played a role in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and in the birth of soul food, both components of larger national movements to recognize African American rights and to celebrate black heritage.

Origin of Sweet Potato Pie in Alabama

Sweet potatoes, both cultivated by Native Americans prior to European arrival and brought by Europeans to America, comprised a significant part of the diet for every class of Southerner. Consumed from late summer until long into the winter, sweet potatoes were a cornerstone of self-sufficient farms and kept many impoverished Southerners alive through the lean years of the Civil War and Reconstruction. As historian Joe Gray Taylor asserts, "It would be difficult to exaggerate the role of the sweet potato" in the South.¹

Sweet potatoes were a particularly vital and ideal food for poor populations, including slaves and yeoman farmers. Sweet potatoes are extremely nutritious and easy to grow and keep. They produce abundantly, often with little human help, and actually give a better yield and higher quality fruit on poor, sandy soil. Sweet potatoes can also be preserved throughout the winter in a mound of dirt.

The centrality of sweet potatoes in the Southern diet made sweet potato

pie a staple in the South beginning in colonial times, when pies both stretched ingredients and made humble meals appear fancy. Europeans, who had consumed pies since the Roman era, were making pies in America using apples, lemons, plums, and sweet potatoes by the late 1600s. Sweet potatoes had been enormously popular in Europe throughout the sixteenth century, especially in England, where many believed they possessed aphrodisiac qualities. European royalty had consumed sweet potatoes in heavily spiced and sugared pies, considered a delicacy, by 1600.

However, because African slaves did the cooking in many colonial and antebellum households, they often made the sweet potato pies for both home consumption and social events. At plantation barbecues, for example, black men tended the pits while black women cooked pastries and pies in iron ovens nearby.

To African slaves, the sweet potato closely resembled their native yam, domesticated in West Africa as early as 16,000 BC. Thus, African slaves possessed a long tradition of cooking with yams when they arrived in America, where they used sweet potatoes in place of yams in West African dishes and prepared European sweet potato dishes in an African fashion.

They experimented with spices, techniques, and various ingredients. To the basic sweet potato pie filling, they added cinnamon, nutmeg, vanilla, cloves, ginger, molasses, orange zest, and coconut. Because pigs were in abundance in the South, they used lard instead of butter in their piecrusts, giving them a distinct, flaky quality.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, George Washington Carver and Alabama Extension Service agents further boosted the popularity of sweet potato pie in Alabama and throughout the South. As the head of the Agricultural Department at Tuskegee Institute, Carver encouraged farmers to plant crops like sweet potatoes that would give nitrogen back to the depleted Alabama soil. To spread his message, Carver produced scores of farming bulletins that were practical, free, and comprehensible.

Between 1898 and 1943, Carver issued nearly fifty bulletins on sweet potatoes alone, significantly boosting the sweet potato's popularity in the South. Carver also invented more than 118 different products from the sweet potato (including molasses, vinegar, and shoe blacking) and put many sweet potato

recipes into circulation. His recipe for sweet potato pie, published in 1936, is a prototype for modern versions.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott

Twenty years after Carver published his 1936 recipe, and forty miles down the road, another black Alabamian injected new meaning into sweet potato pie in Alabama. As the world knows, after Rosa Parks was arrested in 1955 for resisting segregation on city buses, the black community came to her defense and mounted an ultimately successful 382-day boycott. Less well known is how a black cook's unique use of sweet potato pie helped to support the burgeoning civil rights movement.

To maintain momentum, support, and solidarity for the boycott in the face of white intimidation, black churches held mass meetings on Monday and Thursday nights. Meetings began at 7 p.m. to allow working people to attend and often lasted two or three hours, resembling energetic church services that included hymns and preaching. At each meeting, a collection was passed to raise money for boycott needs, including gasoline and car repairs to maintain an elaborate carpool system. Georgia Gilmore, head cook at the National Café, a whites-only cafeteria downtown that catered to blue-collar workers, had been mistreated on a bus once herself, and she became active in the boycott from its



FIGURE 1

Georgia Gilmore seated in the audience at Holt Street Baptist Church. (Photo by Jim Peppler)

inception, bringing sandwiches and pies to the first mass meetings.

Gilmore became a key boycott supporter and fundraiser. She organized a group of women into the Club from Nowhere, so named to prevent whites from discovering its purpose and shutting it down. Club members sold Gilmore's pies and cakes to black and white customers at beauty shops, laundries, cabstands, doctor's offices, stores, churches, and outside downtown cafeterias. All of the proceeds went to the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), often \$100 to \$150 per week. At the mass meeting each Monday night, a member presented the large cash donation and the crowd gave the Club from Nowhere a standing ovation.

When the boycott began, Georgia Theresa Gilmore was a thirty-five-year-old single mother raising four children. Her friend Nelson Malden remembers Gilmore as a kind, generous, well-liked woman who "was hard on her daughters and spoiled her sons." She was friendly and jovial, known to talk at everybody's level and to joke around. "And she could dance," Malden adds. "She had rhythm that you'd never seen before." Gilmore was also a member of the NAACP and fearless. Food writer John Edge describes her as "a mountain of a woman [made] of girth, grit, and sass."⁴ The Reverend Thomas E. Jordan of the Lilly Baptist Church recalls:

She was a lady of great physical stature. She didn't take any junk from anybody. It didn't matter who you were. Even the white police officers let her be. She wasn't a mean person, but like it was with many black people, there was this perception that she might be dangerous. The word was, "Don't mess with Georgia Gilmore, she might cut you." But Lord, that woman could cook. I loved to sit down at her table for some good greasing.⁵

On February 24, 1956, Gilmore testified in the defense of eighty-nine arrested boycott leaders. She joined other housewives, maids, and laborers in attempting to prove the boycott's "just cause" by relating the abuses they had suffered. As *Time* magazine reported:

After a lifetime of taking it quietly, their emotions welled up and overflowed in their testimony. Some began talking before defense lawyers asked for their

names; others could hardly be stopped. Martha Kate Walker told how her blind husband's leg was hurt when a bus driver shut a door on him and drove on. Sadie Brooks told of seeing a Negro man forced from a bus at pistol-point because he did not have the correct change. Delia Perkins testified that a driver had called her an "ugly black ape." Richard Jordan said his pregnant wife had been forced to give her seat to a white woman. Georgia Teresa Gilmore said when she boarded a bus, the driver shouted, "Come out, nigger, and go in the back door," and when she stepped off, drove away.⁶

In her testimony, Gilmore identified the bus driver who once kicked her off a city bus. She also uttered King's favorite line of the trial: "When they count the money, they do not know Negro money from white money." For her testimony, Gilmore was fired from her job. When she went to King for help, he advised her to start her own business and gave her some seed money. Gilmore's business took off immediately. Working at the National Café had given her both cooking experience and business sense. In addition, blacks had limited dining options and Gilmore's home was located in the heart of Centennial Hill, a thriving black neighborhood.

Gilmore opened her home during the lunch hour. Patrons ate at a large, old-fashioned dining room table surrounded by a dozen card table chairs. When those filled up, there were a few stools here and there. Her place was never advertised as a restaurant, and she never called it one. As restaurateur Martha Hawkins recalled, "Everybody just said they was going down by Georgia's to eat."⁷

Gilmore cooked in cast-iron skillets on a regular four-burner stove. She served traditional, Southern home cooking: fried chicken, baked chicken, fried fish, stew meat, liver, collard greens, turnip greens, cream potatoes, beans, potato salad, candied yams, and corn muffins. For a fixed price, customers received one meat, two sides, cornbread, and tea. Pie was extra, and it was usually sweet potato pie, made extraordinarily smooth with a heavy mixer. Gilmore almost always added coconut to the filling.

King was one of her regular customers, known for always drinking a second glass of her famous tea. In fact, Gilmore became King's cook in Montgomery and often catered for MIA meetings. She would walk from her home to King's

parsonage, carrying a large basket of fried chicken and potato salad. And as white reaction to the boycott turned violent, Gilmore's home became a haven where boycott leaders could converse in peace and knew the food was safe.

After a Supreme Court ruling ended the boycott and desegregated Montgomery buses in December 1956, Gilmore continued to cook in her home. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s she hosted many civil rights leaders and supporters, including President Lyndon Johnson and Robert Kennedy. Gilmore's had become more than a meeting place. It was a place of rejuvenation, commitment, and strength. Martha Hawkins explained:

That flavor of what happened inside her walls was what inspired me most. 'Twas something special happening there. The folks writing about Missus Gilmore described meals around her table as more like being at a rally than a restaurant. The feeling in her home became downright sacramental, a camp meeting of sorts with a continual loud and loving conversation about the things that mattered. Folks would feel free to stand or sit or walk about from room to room with plates of food in their hands. It was the fact that a person's cooking could become so much more than cooking—that's what I was aiming to do someday.⁸

The Birth of Soul Food

Though the ambience at Gilmore's may have been unique in Montgomery, her home occupied a larger place in history, as part of a group of black-owned restaurants in Southern cities that functioned as gathering places for civil rights leaders in the 1950s and 1960s. The blend of nourishing food, comforting surroundings, and revolutionary plans that defined these restaurants inspired the term "soul food" and laid the foundation for soul food's popularity in the decades to come.

In the 1950s and 1960s, in many Southern cities including Atlanta, Birmingham, Montgomery, and Memphis, black-owned restaurants located in the heart of traditional black communities "became the hub where people from the movement met and planned their strategy . . . they became gathering places for dissent—places where the next chapter in the African American quest for full equality would be strategized and plotted, organized and launched." Culinary historian Jessica Harris defines these restaurants as "pivot points of

history: places where black entrepreneurship met up with the growing national movement for Civil Rights for African Americans.”

At these restaurants, activists met “over platters of the traditional foods of the African American South—like fried chicken, collard greens, and macaroni and cheese—as they planned their campaigns . . . The menus all harked back to the comfort food of the South” and included pig meat, pig’s feet, pork chops, candied yams, greens, okra, rice, gravy, fried chicken, cornbread, biscuits, and cakes and pies for dessert, including “sweet potato pie, syrupy pecan pie, and nutmeg-scented apple pie.”

As Harris explained, “The food that flourished in these restaurants during the 1960s and 1970s came to be known as soul food because it fed the spirit as much as the body on the long march to institutionalized equality.” But soul food was not simply a label for homey African American fare. Rather, it was part of a broader national movement rooted in a “growing pride in race and self in African American community” and a desire to experience and celebrate black heritage. Harris explained:

There was a growing pride in things black and in the culture that had survived enslavement. It went hand in hand with a hunger to learn more about the black experience and a national feeling of solidarity among blacks. In the early 1960s this pride manifested itself in what could be termed a ‘soul’ movement . . . for the first time in many lives there was a palpable pride in the uniqueness of the African American experience in the United States . . . The term ‘soul food’ harks back to this era, when everything that was black and of the moment had soul, and the word’s use signaled a change in attitude toward the food of the African American South.

Soul food was as much an affirmation as a diet. Eating neckbones and chitlins, turnip greens, and fried chicken, became a political statement for many . . . and was embraced by many middle-class blacks who had previously publicly eschewed it as a relic of a slave past. [Soul food] became popular and even celebrated . . . African American restaurants that had existed since the early part of the century were increasingly being patronized not only by blacks but also by those in sympathy with the movement . . . By the late 1960s and

early 1970s, soul food had gained a powerful allure.⁹

Martha's Place

About the time Georgia Gilmore was baking sweet potato pies and cooking soul food to support the movement, Martha Hawkins, a young black girl in Montgomery, was piecing together her own dream of opening a special kind of restaurant. Hawkins did not yet know of Gilmore, but remembers the moment she realized she wanted to open a restaurant in the spirit of her predecessor. It dawned on her in the relief of returning home for a dinner of pork chop casserole after becoming lost in her family's new neighborhood. In her memoir, *Finding Martha's Place*, Hawkins recalled:

Daddy spooned my plate high with the good casserole and I took the first bite and it felt like all the comfort of being where I was supposed to be. The casserole was salty and smooth from the butter and just about too hot to eat but I blew on my spoon and it went down my throat and made me feel happy inside. All of a sudden, in that very same moment, I knew what I wanted to do with my life . . . I would make a place where people could eat and I'd serve people comfort food like the pork chop casserole we was having tonight. It wouldn't be no ordinary restaurant neither. When people was out getting lost wandering around Union Circle or doing whatever people do to feel tight inside and worried that they might never find their way home, I would tell 'em to come into my restaurant, and they would feel like they had come home at last. Their mama would be cooking in that restaurant, or someone who seemed just like their mama to them, anyway. And they would sit next to friendly people they knowed, and grace would be prayed over their supper if they was praying folks, and they would settle in and give a big sigh and they would know that when they was eating supper in my restaurant that they had come home for sure. That's what I would do. I knowed it right there like I knows it for sure. I would open a restaurant someday and give people little slices of all that was good.

Martha Hawkins would have her restaurant, but she walked a gritty path to get there. Hawkins was born in 1947, the tenth of twelve children. Her father worked at a fertilizer factory, then as a janitor. His children grew up



FIGURE 2

Martha Hawkins. (Photo by Valerie Downes)

in a segregated Montgomery. But it was not just the separation that stung. It was the fact that blacks were constantly given second-class things to remind them of their status: raggedy school books, grubby water fountains, stand-only lunch counters, movie theaters full of rats, hard waiting room chairs. It wasn't only that blacks and whites were separated in doctor's offices. It was that blacks were forced to wait until the last white person was seen, regardless of whose appointment was first, or if the white person had an appointment at all.

Hawkins's father followed the movement in Montgomery, and she can recall every black person killed by white violence during her youth. She heard Martin Luther King Jr. speak several times and was part of a march broken up

by Klansmen on horseback who “had whips and started busting the marchers with those whips. It didn’t matter who it was or if you were a boy or girl, the whips busted down over and over. I heard them sizzle and zap, sizzle and zap. Folks were screaming now everywhere, all of us frenzied to get away.”

Martha Hawkins became pregnant for the first time at age fifteen and quit high school after the tenth grade. She was married on her sixteenth birthday, divorced by eighteen, and gave birth to four boys in six years. But despite the odds, Hawkins was determined to make a life for her sons. She worked night shifts at a local factory while her mother kept the boys. She worked despite numerous medical issues and intense pain. But when she fell victim to an unspeakably violent crime, Hawkins became suicidal and entered a mental hospital.

Still, she rose up. Hawkins started to help out at the hospital, visiting, cleaning, doing the residents’ hair. “A job with a purpose,” she says, “goes a long way toward healing a body.” And she began reading the Bible, which offered “the best flood of healing I was drinking in . . . That’s how I was getting through one day to the next—by reminding myself of God’s promises every morning, every afternoon, every evening, just reading, reading, reading. That’s how I knew that things was gonna be all right someday.”

When Hawkins returned home, cooking became her solace. The kitchen had always been an inspiring, comforting place for her, where “like magic” her mother took plain garden ingredients, collards and peas, and turned them into something incredible. And there was always enough to go around, despite the family’s meager income. So when Hawkins returned home, she remembered, “The cooking was flowing out of me as free and easy as breathing.” She gives a description of Thanksgiving gravy and butter that parallels her rising hope and happiness as she healed and rediscovered her life’s purpose:

Let me tell you about that gravy I was making. It was simmering hot on the stove with the finest turkey pieces bobbing all about—’twas the giblets where all the flavor stays—and that gravy, I swear it was so full of joy at the thought of being poured over that meal it was grinning right along with all my family members seated around my table; that gravy just splashed and laughed its way over peas and dressing and white meat and mashed potatoes. And the butter—

it came to the dinner with a smiley personality, too. That good country butter was cooked into that feast with all joy I could beckon. It was melting into rolls and caressing those sauces and hugging the carrots and making everybody feel downright giddy. Have you ever felt giddy about butter? Not many folks realize that butter is an intoxicant. When it's made with love it's transformed along the same lines as that miracle wine Jesus dished up at the wedding in Cana. Butter refreshes the heart and soothes the soul and bursts forth from old wineskins because you can't contain the blessed spirit of good country butter.

As Hawkins relished and rooted herself in her kitchen, she felt increasing dread about her factory job, which she describes as “that thick, dull feeling that there's something more truthful to who you are that you should be doing, but you ain't.” So, listening to the “voice of love” moving in her life, Hawkins decided to quit her job, give up her suburban home, go on public assistance, and move back to the projects. Her friends and family, predictably, thought she was crazy. But no longer working the long factory shifts allowed Hawkins to get involved in community work, and it was through this work that she made the connections which led to the realization of her dream: opening her own restaurant.

Still, it was not a sudden realization. Hawkins waited over a year for the house that became her restaurant to come available. And for another year she worked on the house piece by piece with whatever money she could save. Like Georgia Gilmore, she sold cakes and pies. She bought one bucket of paint at a time, scraped off wallpaper by hand, scrounged garage sales for pots and pans. She moved out of her own home and into the upstairs of the house to save money. As she said, “Every dime I had went into opening that restaurant.”

But at the same time, Hawkins was committed to opening the restaurant her way. She rejected a \$50,000 investment offer from a local bank in order to retain control.

She had committed herself to hiring those who were down on their luck, to being “a place of second chances.” She envisioned something beyond the ordinary, “a special restaurant where folks can eat good food and talk about the things that matter and sort through life and feel good afterward.” It was during this time that she read about Georgia Gilmore and became inspired by

the way her home had functioned as a place of renewal, unity, and strength.

Martha's Place opened on October 17, 1988. Rosa Parks was one of Hawkins's first customers and became a regular, always taking corn muffins to go. In 1989, Hawkins spoke with her role model, Georgia Gilmore, for the first time. Gilmore told Hawkins to enjoy the restaurant, and to run it not for the money, but because she loved it. And she told Hawkins how to make her famous sweet tea, instructions that ended, ". . . *just drink 'til you're tired. You can't have just one glass, you know, Martha. You will never want to stop drinking tea.* That's what she said to me," Hawkins recalled, "her voice all sassy and free."

Sweet potato pie was on the menu the day Martha opened her restaurant. Today, she bakes five or six sweet potato pies every Wednesday, using her mother's recipe. She ticks off the ingredients: sweet potatoes, Carnation milk, eggs, sugar, butter, nutmeg, and flavor (vanilla extract). But the most important ingredient, she reminds me, is love. And some customers say they can feel it, "an actual tingle when they walk through the front door." It seems Martha has created the place she dreamed of as a child, where she would "give people little slices of all that was good" and they would know "they had come home for sure."¹⁰ ■

Martha Hawkins's Sweet Potato Pie

- 3 pounds sweet potatoes
- 3 eggs
- ½ cup melted butter
- 2½ cups of sugar
- 1 cup evaporated milk
- 1 teaspoon nutmeg
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 2 unbaked 9-inch pie shells

Cook potatoes in water in saucepan until tender, drain. Combine sweet potatoes, eggs, melted butter, sugar, milk, and nutmeg in bowl; mix well. Stir in vanilla. Pour into pie shells. Bake at 375 for 1 hour or until set. Yield: 16 servings.

Notes

- 1 Taylor, Joe Gray. 1989. "Foodways," in *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, edited by Charles Reagan Wilson, William Ferris, and Ann J. Adadie. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, pp. 613–16.
- 4 Edge, John T. 2000. *Southern Belly: The Ultimate Food Lover's Companion to the South*. Athens, GA: Hill Street Press, p. 15.
- 5 Edge, pp. 15-16.
- 6 "New Sounds in a Courthouse." 1956. *Time*. April 2.
- 7 Hawkins, Martha and Marcus Brotherton. 2010. *Finding Martha's Place*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, p. 173.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Harris, Jessica. 2011. *High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey from Africa to America*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury USA, pp. 199-209.
- 10 Hawkins and Brotherton. pp. ix, 32, 42, 126–7, 137-8, 158, 178, 191, 202.

Fried Lacy Cornbread

Sylvia G. Stephens

Fine ground corn meal. A little salt to taste and water. Mix it 'til it's soupy and spoon it into a very hot skillet. Fry it in sizzling hot vegetable oil or lard until it's a light golden brown on both sides. What do you get? Fried lacy cornbread!

Several of the cooks interviewed for the Alabama Folklife Association's Foodways Project remembered the cornbread as "fried cornbread," but agreed that it is probably called "lacy cornbread" because the edges around the patty resemble the holey, curled up edges of a crocheted doily. While it may be found in other parts of the state and called by other names, both black and white people in Alabama's Wiregrass region regard it as a specialty of the area.

The Wiregrass includes portions of Alabama, Florida, and Georgia. In Alabama, the Wiregrass is made up of nine counties in the lower southeastern corner of the state: Barbour, Henry, Coffee, Covington, Crenshaw, Dale, Geneva, Houston, and Pike. It includes major cities and county seats like Dothan, Enterprise, Eufaula, Fort Rucker, Ozark, and Troy, as well as small, rural towns like Abbeville and Skipperville.

At a meeting of the Matron's Club of Abbeville, members told Alabama Folklife Association director Joyce Cauthen that outside of the area it is hard to buy the finely ground cornmeal that is required to make fried lacy cornbread. Local mills supply the demand, however.

The Pollard Milling Company in Hartford still makes cornmeal the old-fashioned way by slowly grinding the corn between two granite stones that can be set to produce medium, fine, and extra-fine cornmeal. One of the six mills currently used to grind the cornmeal is more than a century old. Jimmy Pollard, a third-generation owner, and his business partner and sister-in-law,

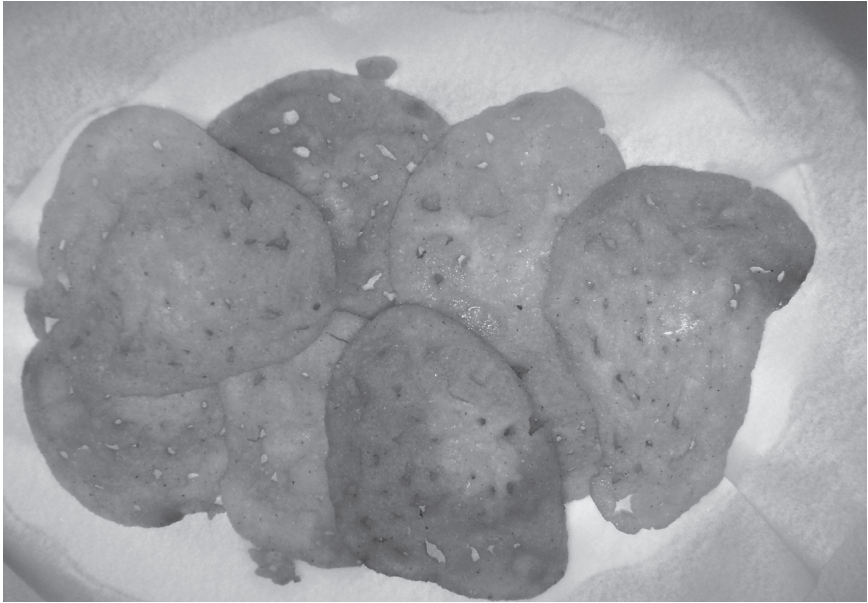


FIGURE 1

Fried lacy cornbread. (Photo by Sylvia Stephens)

Paula Pollard, follow the traditions of his father and grandfather. Pollard, a miller who learned from his father how to set the stones to grind the corn, explained that the corn used comes from Kentucky and is a “full season” white corn that matures in the field. In the Wiregrass, cooks tend to prefer Pollard’s fine-ground cornmeal to make fried lacy cornbread.

Connie Floyd, a white caterer in Troy, learned to cook fried cornbread from her grandmother and never used a written recipe. Floyd said she made the cornbread from memory and instinctively knew from watching her grandmother about how much water to mix into the fine ground meal to get the right consistency. She would let the batter drip off the side of a spoon to see if it was thin enough and ready to spoon into the skillet with a shallow layer of hot oil that barely covers the bottom. Floyd and co-worker Erma Hamm created their recipe from memory.

Erma Hamm, a former school cook who has lived most of her life in the Wiregrass, said her father was the cook at her house and she learned to make

fried cornbread from watching him. She said the cornbread has to have the right consistency to cook up right and end up with that lacy appearance. Hamm remembers it being called “fried” cornbread and recalls that her father added other ingredients into the batter, such as okra, before he fried the cornbread in a sizzling hot skillet. She said fried cornbread tastes better when it’s hot, right out of the skillet.

Manonia Snell recalls from her childhood having lacy cornbread at church functions and she still fries lacy cornbread for her family. Snell, a retired school teacher in Skipperville, adds a little self-rising flour to her cornbread mix and makes sure it is soupy enough before she fries it in hot vegetable oil in a black cast-iron skillet. Some evenings after supper, her husband Jessie crumbles crispy pieces of the cornbread into a thick, tall glass, fills it with sweet milk, sprinkles in a little salt, and stirs it with a tablespoon to eat and enjoy. Snell searched for a recipe for lacy cornbread, but could not find one, so she created her own.

Here is Miss Connie’s and Miss Erma’s recipe for you to make for yourself. You might want to add your own special ingredients like Erma’s daddy or add a tablespoon or two of flour like Miss Manonia does. ■

Fried Lacy Cornbread

(Made by Connie Floyd & Erma Hamm, Troy, Alabama)

2 cups fine-ground cornmeal

1 teaspoon salt

2¼ cups water (tap water or water at room temperature)

Vegetable oil (or lard)

Mix dry ingredients, adding water until batter is thin and pourable.

Pour a tablespoon of batter into skillet with a thin layer of hot oil.

Fry on both sides until golden brown.

(This article was reprinted from the program, “Alabama Foodways Gathering: Celebrating Food Traditions from Four Regions of Alabama,” printed in 2009 by the Alabama Folklife Association.)

A Taste of Community: Community Cookbooks at the W. S. Hoole Special Collections Library

Jessica Lacher-Feldman

The W. S. Hoole Special Collections Library at the University of Alabama holds a rich collection of diverse materials. As a flagship archival repository, we pride ourselves on being the first place that researchers would consider when researching any component of Alabama history, whether it be politics, art, music, or food ways, as we hold these resources to aid in scholarship and study of aspects of Alabama culture from territorial days to the present. For our *Alabama Collection*, we actively collect resources including books and other materials about Alabama or aspects of Alabama such as community histories; books and other materials by Alabama authors, including fiction and nonfiction, and materials published in Alabama. Most elusive are small-press and self-published items, which can be difficult to find but are often the most important to collect, as we are the only library to collect them. Since we are a noncirculating collection, we are in it for the long haul, with a goal towards keeping the contents for posterity. We seek out this material and often depend upon citizens to send us these items when they find them or create them.

The “community” cookbooks in the Hoole Library’s *Alabama Collection* are challenging to collect but are a growing and important part of our repository’s holdings, especially given the increasing popular interest in cookery and culinary history. Loosely defined as locally or regionally self-published and with a limited press run, these books of recipes are usually compiled by community groups. We see them produced by schools and PTAs, churches and synagogues, Junior League chapters, historical societies, alumni organizations, or similar entities. These cookbooks offer a unique opportunity to study and reflect on *community*.

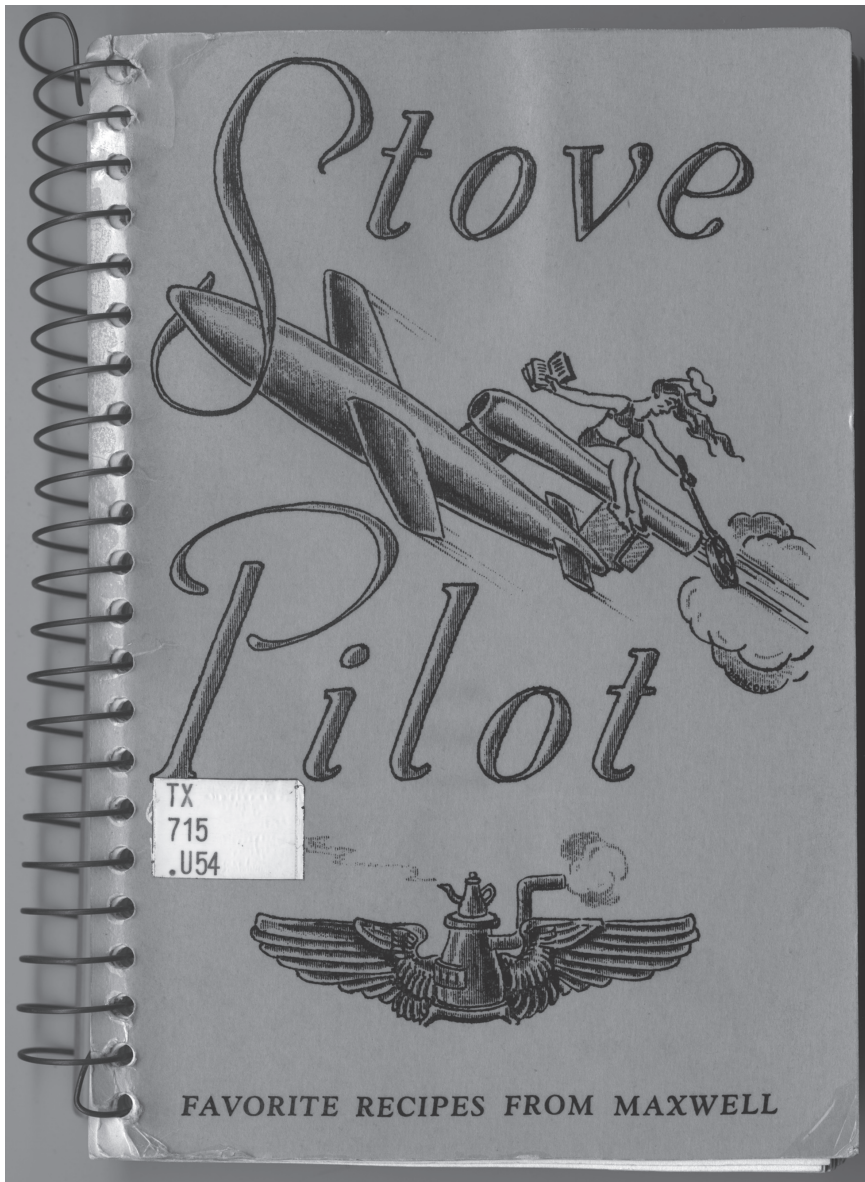


FIGURE 1

The humorous, racy, and somewhat offensive cover of the 1955 edition of *Stove Pilot*, published by the Women's Club of Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama.

A personal favorite is *Stove Pilot: Favorite Recipes from Maxwell*, which was compiled by the Women's Club of Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama. The Hoole Library holds three different editions of the cookbook: the second edition, published in June 1948; the seventh edition, published in December 1952; and the eleventh edition, published in September 1955. The hand-written recipes, along with some charming (and somewhat bizarre) line drawings were brought together for the benefit of "overseas recovery." The foreword states that "some are gathered from foreign lands, some are family recipes passed from generation to generation, and some are shared through friendship." "Chop Suey for 20," in the section, "United We Eat" is a distinctly stateside take on the exotic Asian fare that might have been served to these women's husbands while they were stationed overseas. The recipe, which calls for lard as well as simmering the meat (pork) for "several hours," is a far cry from what we might think of for Chinese cookery, or even the ubiquitous American-style

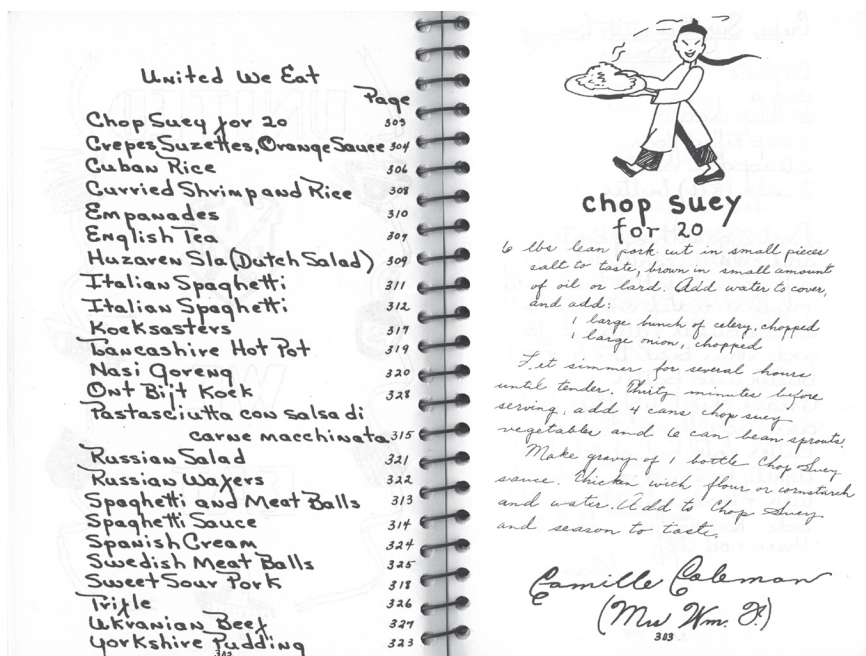


FIGURE 2

A less-than appetizing recipe for "Chop Suey for 20," from *Stove Pilot: Favorite Recipes from Maxwell* (11th edition, 1955).

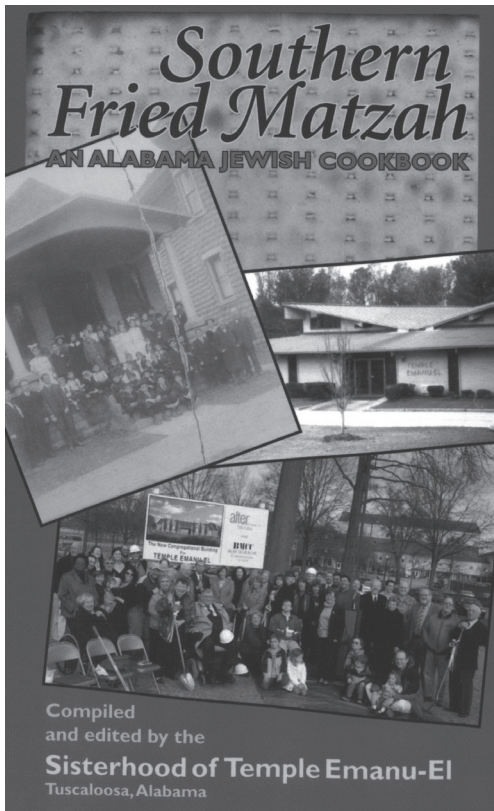


FIGURE 3

Southern Fried Matzah: An Alabama Jewish Cookbook was put together by the Sisterhood of Temple Emanu-El in Tuscaloosa in 2009. It features kosher and non-kosher recipes from community members, including the author.

Chinese cuisine. It is also not something that readily comes to mind when thinking about fare from Alabama, though this collection is very much an “Alabama” item.

I had the opportunity to contribute to one of the most recent additions to our collection. As a member of the Tuscaloosa Jewish community and of the Sisterhood of Temple Emanu-El, I contributed three family recipes (and stories!) to *Southern Fried Matzah: An Alabama Jewish Cookbook* in 2009. My grandmother Edith’s cabbage soup, my mother Esther’s roast chicken, and my grandfather Jack’s fried peppers all made the cookbook. And while my grandparents did not live to see my move from New York to Alabama, and my mother had the opportunity to visit me in my adopted home only once before she passed

away, these recipes live on and take on new life in my adopted community of Tuscaloosa, where they are enjoyed with new friends and family. It is the fluidity of community that makes the concept so rich. One hundred years from now, I hope people in Tuscaloosa will be making fried peppers like my grandfather did, using a technique he learned from a close Italian-American friend from my hometown of Schenectady, New York.

In addition to the cookbooks in the *Alabama Collection*, and another sig-

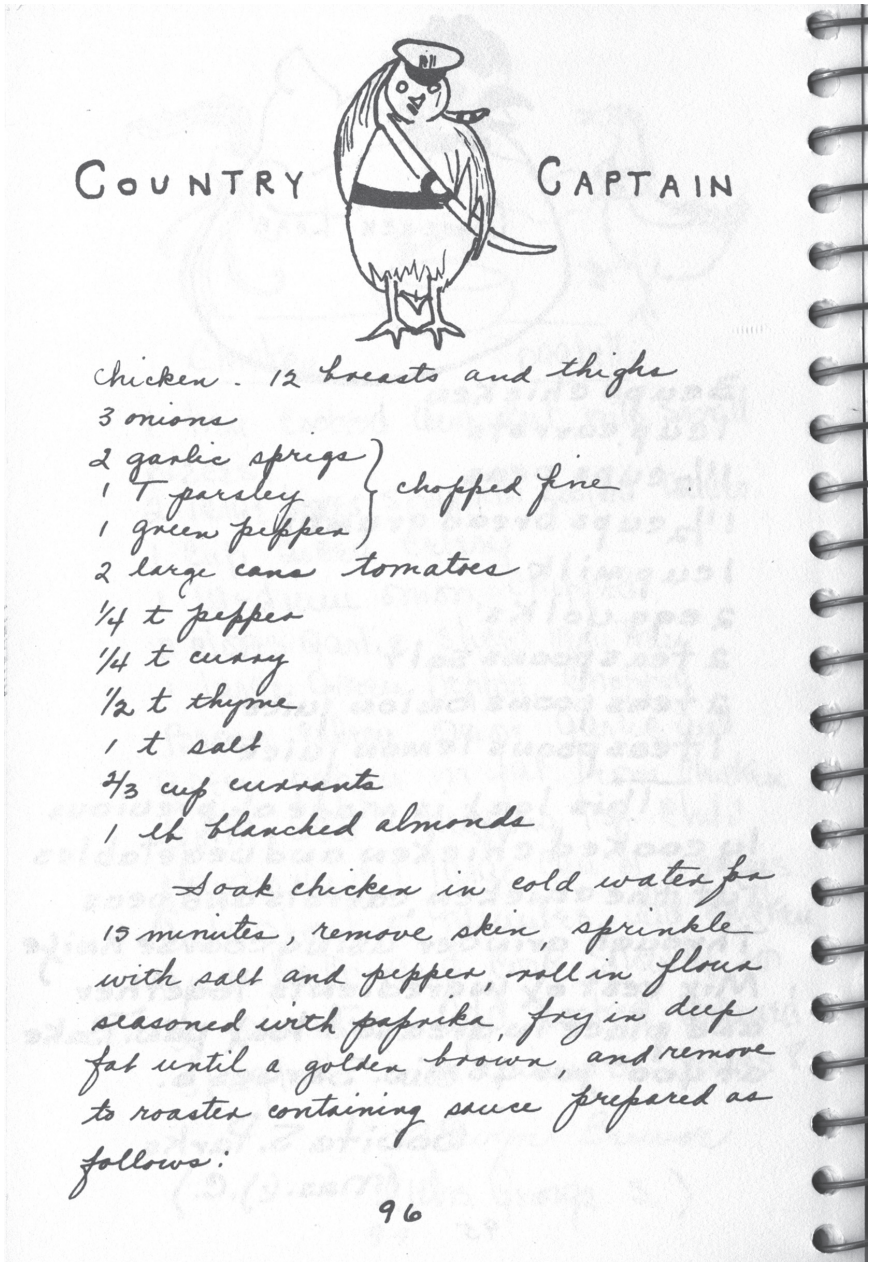


FIGURE 4

Detail from a country captain recipe, *Stove Pilot* (11th edition, 1955).

nificant grouping of Southern cookery materials in the *Wade Hall Collection of History and Culture*, the Hoole Library is also home to the *David Walker Lupton African American Cookbook Collection*,¹ one of the largest and best-documented collections of African American cookbooks in the United States. Covering 1927–2000, this collection has been an important resource for scholars, students, and community members since it was acquired by the University of Alabama Libraries. The collection has been featured on a culinary radio show in Miami and in newspaper pieces as far away as Chicago and Detroit. Visiting scholars and researchers have used the collection to study the origins of cocktails, the use of certain ingredients in cooking, and the evolution of holidays in African American communities.

Some of the community cookbooks from the Special Collections holdings were featured in a piece in the *New York Times* by Sam Sifton, former culture editor, now the paper's food critic. John T. Edge, the award-winning food writer, author, columnist, and director of the Southern Foodways Alliance, who wrote a great piece on the Lupton African American Cookbook Collection entitled "Reading the Lupton African American Cookbook Collection"² gave Sifton my name, and Sifton then contacted me to see what we could do to help him get to the meat of the matter with regard to the famed "Country Captain." A fascinating piece of food history, "Country Captain" is a popular regional (and somehow coastal, despite the chicken) dish served in Charleston and Savannah restaurants and homes. We found, as Sam said in his article, "there are captains enough in [the] collections to staff a navy." Sifton's article, published in the *New York Times Magazine* on January 23, 2009, brings together great storytelling, vivid description, and a truly great recipe for a mild and vaguely exotic chicken dish, studded with almonds and currants in a buttery curry sauce served on a bed of rice.³ The recipe shows up in *Recipe Jubilee*, from the Junior League of Mobile (1964), and also in *Stove Pilot*.

Some of the Alabama community cookbooks reflect regional specialties and ingredients. *Recipe Jubilee* from the Junior League of Mobile (1964) not only includes the famed "Country Captain," but also features page after page of seafood recipes such as "Deviled Crab," "Sautéed Red Snapper Bombay," and "Shrimp Creole for Twenty-five" which calls for ten pounds of raw shrimp and somehow only a "pinch of thyme" and "four garlic cloves". The name

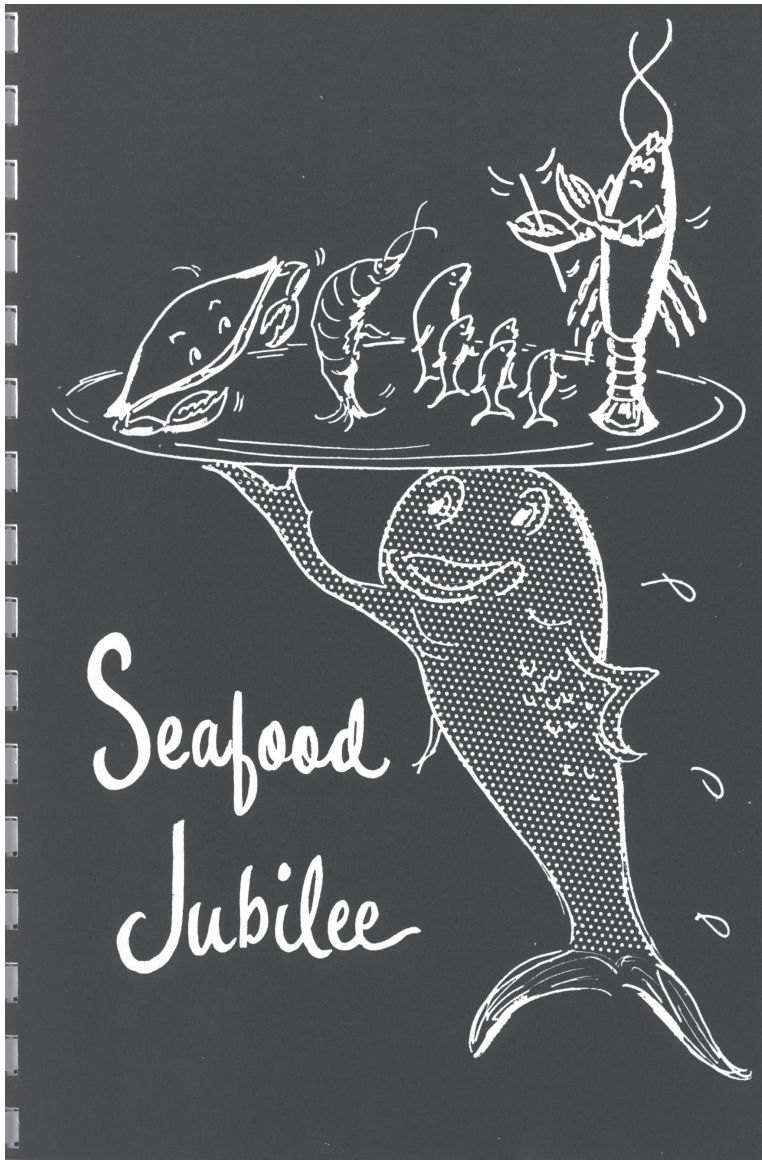


FIGURE 5

This adorable drawing is one of many from *Recipe Jubilee!* published by the Junior League of Mobile, Inc. This 1964 edition offers many treasured Mobile dishes such as West Indies Salad, and many mid-century American classics such as molded salads and ham loaf.

“Jubilee” is well-known to Alabamians from near the coast, as it is the name used locally for a natural phenomenon that occurs sporadically on the shores of Mobile Bay, when fish and other seafood travel from deeper waters to the shallow parts of the bay, making them easy to catch, thus ensuring a bountiful seafood feast.

Wiregrass Cooking through the Years (1981), compiled by the Henry County Historical Society, not only features a wide selection of peanut recipes, but also an interesting mix of “Wiregrass Indian Cooking” with recipes for such treats as “Choctaw Indian Jellied Rattlesnake” and “Corn Cob Jelly, Creek Indian.” While it may be hard to swallow the notion of these items being “traditional fare, or of American Indian origin, a Hoole Library colleague who is a native of south Alabama grew up eating corn cob jelly made by his mother. Distinctive ingredients and techniques which are largely associated with the Deep South are a big part of these cook books, including such staples as peas and beans, peanuts, cornmeal, catfish, okra, and sweet potatoes.

The “crown jewels” of these community cookbooks are the desserts, especially the cakes, which seem to have a special place in the hearts and memories of their contributors. Recipes for “Smorgasbord Spice Cake” with “sea foam frosting,” from the *Look and Cook* cookbook (n.d., ca. 1950), published by the Birmingham Baptist Hospital School of Nursing Alumnae Association certainly invokes the flair that one would expect when trying to impress your friends at a dinner party or at a bake sale.

A reflection on the Alabama community cookbooks in our collections would not be complete without mentioning the “Lane Cake,” a towering multi-layered cake with a rich filling that includes ingredients like pecans, raisins, coconut—and always plenty of whiskey. Even in fictional Maycomb, Alabama, Harper Lee’s beloved character Scout from *To Kill a Mockingbird* comments on her neighbor Maudie Atkinson’s famous Lane cake, which Scout said was “so loaded with shinny [moonshine] it made me tight.”

In light of the recent devastation in Tuscaloosa and in other parts of Alabama, these community cookbooks have yet another layer of cultural and historical significance when we think about the fluidity, unpredictability, and fragility of the notion of place and community. We do our best to identify and acquire any community cookbook from Alabama, as it serves as a unique

LANE CAKE

Mrs. William Whatley
Dothan, Alabama

1 c. butter	4 1/2 tsp. baking powder
2 1/2 c. sugar	1 tsp. vanilla
4 c. sifted flour	10 egg whites
1 c. sweet milk	1 tsp. salt

Cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Sift flour, baking powder and salt together and add alternately with milk. Fold in stiffly beaten egg whites. Add vanilla. Bake in four pans, greased and floured. 350 degrees for approximately 30 minutes.

Filling:

12 egg yolks	1 c. chopped raisins
2 c. sugar	2 c. chopped pecans
1 c. butter	2 c. Angel Flake coconut
1/2 c. whiskey	

Beat egg yolks, blend with sugar. Cook in double boiler until thick. Add coconut, pecans and raisins. Add whiskey. Spread between layers and the top and sides.

**LANE CAKE (My Mother's Version)

Mattie Searcy Galloway
Annie Clare Galloway Johnson
Ellen Lucas Flowers Hatcher
Ruby Hatcher Williams Lucas

whites of 8 eggs	2 tsp. baking powder
2 c. sugar	1 c. milk
1 c. butter	1/4 tsp. salt
3 1/4 c. flour (sift before measuring)	1 tsp. vanilla

Sift sugar. Cream with butter until mixture is very light and fluffy. Sift flour, baking powder and salt together 3 times. Blend flour mixture and milk into sugar mixture alternately, beginning and ending with flour. Beat well. Blend in stiffly beaten egg whites and vanilla. Bake in 4 layers in 350 degree oven until cake is lightly browned and springs back when lightly pressed with finger.

Lane Cake Filling:

yolks of 8 eggs	1 lb. nuts
1 c. sugar	1 lb. raisins
1/2 c. butter	1 coconut and milk of coconut
1 tsp. vanilla	1 c. wine (8 oz.)

(Cont.)

FIGURE 6

The Lane Cake is the one dessert most associated with Alabama. These recipes appeared in *Wiregrass Cooking through the Years, 1600-1981*, compiled and published in 1981 by the Henry County Historical Society in Abbeville.

and revealing snapshot of community history in a particular time and place. If you have a community cookbook, regional cookbook, or a menu from an Alabama restaurant you'd like to donate to our growing collection, please send it along! And if you'd like a recipe for poppy seed chicken, hush puppies, watermelon pickle, or sour cream pound cake, you know where to find them! Come on over! ■

Notes

All images are courtesy of the W. S Hoole Special Collections Library, The University of Alabama.

1. For a complete description of the Lupton African-American Cookbook Collection, as well as a list of the 450 titles in the collection, visit <http://www.lib.ua.edu/libraries/hoole/collections/luptoncollection.htm>.
2. *Southern Cultures*, the journal of the University of North Carolina's Center for the Study of the American South, Volume 15, Number 4, Winter 2009, pp. 103-105 (Article).
3. The Cheat, Master Class: Country Captain, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/25/magazine/25food-t-000.html>. Accessed April 26, 2011.

Southwest Alabama's Culinary Trail

Linda Vice

Tourism efforts were late coming to rural southwest Alabama. The interstate had passed us by. We had not grown or prospered economically. Tourism came only as a last resort to entice travelers and their money into the region. It became my job as director of the Southwest Alabama Tourism and Film Office to find out what we had that was marketable in an area comprising Choctaw, Clarke, Conecuh, Dallas, Escambia, Marengo, Monroe, Perry, Sumter, Washington, and Wilcox counties.

We discovered that we were rich in history, heritage and natural resources. We were also famous for our Black Belt hospitality. That hospitality, along with the food we prepared, became our greatest assets. We learned this by accident. When we brought people in, we fed them well as a matter of hospitality. We just took it for granted that feeding people was part of our mission in life. A noted exemplar of our region's hospitality was the late Kathryn Tucker Windham, Alabama's storyteller and our "patron saint of tourism." She started out as a reporter and columnist who became a cookbook writer, then wrote a series of Southern ghost tales, and then went on to a storytelling career. She got started with her book-writing career by doing what she did best—cooking for guests. Her high school chum, Helen Morgan Aiken, and her husband were visiting with Kathryn and, of course, eating dinner with her. Helen and her husband published books and suggested that Kathryn write a cookbook. *Treasured Alabama Recipes* was born as the basic cookbook of what our region has to offer. It is still in print. Autographed copies of the book are still around in which Kathryn has written along with her signature, "Never put sugar in cornbread." This is the way she prepared it and she thought only Yankees like sweet cornbread. She cooked and served sugarless cornbread along with

homemade vegetable soup to everybody from filmmakers to famous artists. Her home was modest, but she always invited guests to eat with her. It's just what we do in the Black Belt area. It is a custom left over from when there were no restaurants to take people to or when amenities were miles apart. In many cases, they still are.

When we entertain, we make everything ourselves or find a caterer who does. One way we decide who gets to make a wedding cake is whether he or she uses a mix. We make our own cheese straws and piecrusts. We knew we could be proud of the things we cooked. When we found that many of our visitors had never experienced the kind of cooking we do, we began to recognize the specialness of our regional cuisine. Once we realized that our food had become a big draw, we started incorporating it into every event we held.

In the case of the six hundred-plus miles of the Alabama Scenic River Trail, we believe we have its most beautiful stretch of unspoiled river. We have a yearly paddle on the Alabama River which has turned out to be as well-known for the food we serve as for the scenery. When you take people way back in the woods, we've learned you need to feed them well and make their trip something memorable. For the weekend paddle, we serve locally made smoked sausages and stone-ground local grits with tomatoes and cheese folded in. We get hickory-smoked pulled pork barbecue from Melvin Fogle in Monroeville. He caters in addition to his fulltime job and is open on Saturdays in his Cherry Street Bar-B-Q located right downtown under the water tank. He opens at 10 A.M. and stays there until he sells out. He is usually sold out around 2 P.M., which attests to his local popularity. Once people get a taste of the food, they return.

Seeing the impact our cooking had on tourists, we put together a culinary trail that takes people all over rural southwest Alabama. We have a variety of options that can be tailored for groups. You must be part of a group since many of the tour stops are not restaurants but are either historic sites or private residences, open by appointment only. Our brochure lists these sites as well as those open to the casual traveler. The ideal group size is twelve to fifteen people because that size group can ride together in a large van, learning of foodways and folklife as they travel. The casual traveler can visit some of the sites on his or her own but will miss the fellowship of fellow food lovers. One of my



FIGURE 1

Gaines Ridge interior. (Photo courtesy of www.alabamafrontporches.org)

favorite sayings is “Food is one of my religions and I worship at every shrine I pass.” I enjoy leading other people to these shrines, too.

Recipes and preparation styles vary within just a few miles of each location. For instance, there are two local sausage brands that are much in demand. The oldest of these brands is the Monroe Sausage, which began production in the 1940s. It suspended production in the 1960s and was reintroduced in the 1990s. The other is Conecuh Sausage, which began producing later, but has been continuously in production. It is said of people from around here that when they move away and then come back to visit, they bring an extra suitcase to take some sausage home with them. I know for a fact that you can pack ten one-pound packages in a \$10 express mail container for sending home.

These two sausages are produced in adjacent counties, but they are very different products. Both sausages are heavily smoked links, but Conecuh seems to have less fat and a slightly better spice blend. It may even have a touch of sweetness. It is a matter of taste which is best. When Monroeville Sausage was reopened as Monroe Sausage at a new plant in Beatrice (still in Monroe

County), we were excited. We had eaten that recipe in our youth. Now, we have two locally produced sausages to offer.

This region is blessed to be the crossroads for several kinds of cuisine. We are close enough to the coast to have ready access to fresh seafood. Seafood has been coming up this way by steamboat and railroad as long as anybody can remember. African cultigens such as okra and cowpeas (black-eyed peas) were contributions of the enslaved African Americans who influenced Southern foodways. American Indian culture contributed sweet potatoes, corn in all its various forms from cornbread and hominy to roasting ears, squash, and beans. The Anglo settlers brought scones reborn as biscuits and the tradition of cooking turnips and collards. The “Irish” potato and the tomato were originally introduced into Europe by the Spanish conquistadors and quickly became a part of Old World cuisine, returning to the United States with waves of immigrants who probably had no knowledge of the plants’ New World origins.

We love wild game and pride ourselves on the varied ways we fix it. Local wild game suppers feature venison and turkey along with exotics like coon, possum, rattlesnake, and, basically, as they say of road kill, anything that didn’t make it across the road. Men will eat anything fried and with gravy, especially in an environment where they are trying to impress each other.

When we began preparing the Southwest Alabama Culinary Trail, we had a lot of choices to sift through. We learned that some things we thought everybody ate were not quite as common as we had thought. In the process of talking about tomato gravy and finding local restaurants that prepare it, we found that this dish is basically indigenous to the Deep South states. But we didn’t know that all Southerners didn’t know to take their bacon or sausage drippings and add tomatoes to the breakfast gravy. Of course, we looked for places that did to include on the trail. One of those places is AJ’s in Monroeville. Recently, we took a travel writer there for breakfast. AJ’s had tomato gravy, cheese grits, and Conecuh sausage on their buffet. The writer was from San Francisco and she went into ecstasy over the tomato gravy. She asked to meet the cook, who was quite shy but would not give out her recipe. Hers was a little different, with finely chopped onions, bacon, and bell peppers in addition to the tomatoes, and a hint of some spice. It reminded me of Brennan’s sauce for grillades and grits in New Orleans. Miss San Francisco Writer took pictures

of the tomato gravy and promised to write about it—she still didn't get the recipe. (For the sake of comparison, Gaston's Grill in Thomasville serves the more conventional version.)

In preparing the culinary trail, we talked to the people at the Monroe County Heritage Museum and discovered that in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, they had studied the book and found enough local foods mentioned to put together a menu based on the book. The museum staff served that meal to a big group at the Hybart House, a 1930s-era property owned by the museum. The staff has agreed to fix this same menu for our Culinary Tour groups.

Of course, we had to include the region's special restaurants that are listed in the Alabama Department of Tourism's brochure "100 Places to Eat Before You Die." These are generally interesting places for more than just their signature dishes. Some are scenic destinations in themselves. In some cases, they are the only restaurant that prepares a famous dish a certain way. A good example is the Black Bottom Pie served at Gaines Ridge Supper Club in Camden. That recipe originated elsewhere, but it is time-consuming to prepare, so it is not often commercially available. Gaines Ridge makes it just the way it used to be when it was the pride of fussy home cooks. Another interesting restaurant on the trail is the Tally-Ho in Selma, which is also listed on the Alabama Ghost Trail because it started life as a speakeasy where one of the patrons never left.

For our Culinary Trail tours, we put people whenever possible into bed and breakfasts to give them a more complete taste of our hospitality. If hotels are used, we feature those with interesting food options or that are near a special food attraction.

Holmestead is a tour stop that is a working farm that raises its own organic beef. Visitors there will be treated to a cookout featuring that beef and they will get to tour this oldest working farm in Alabama where they will see antique farm implements and an old country store that houses a gristmill.

On the trail, the options include two cooking classes. One is a Viking Cooking School in the Wind Creek Casino, with a chef; the other is arranged in a private home with a local cook. This gives two cooking perspectives, the local and the fancy. People can choose which they want.

In developing this tour, we asked ourselves what is unique about this



FIGURE 2

Holmestead. (Photo courtesy of www.alabamasfrontporches.org)

region's food. It was also important to allow visitors to customize their tours to their interests and time frames. A leader who knows the region's story and cooking traditions guides each tour. We take our visitors to interesting places and feed them well. It is fun for the traveler to experience our culinary and folklife traditions and fun for us to share our food and stories.

For more information on the Southwest Alabama Culinary Tours, go to www.alabamasfrontporches.com. ■

In Memoriam

KATHRYN TUCKER WINDHAM, 1918–2011

Kathryn Tucker Windham, the successful writer and Alabama's best-known storyteller, died June 12, 2011. Born and raised in Thomasville, she became famous for her advocacy of the Southern narrative tradition learned at her father's side. She broke with modern storytelling convention with her casual style and use of personal narrative and did much to fuel the national storytelling movement of the last three decades. Mrs. Windham, despite our age difference, always corrected me to call her "Kathryn." Her charm captured her listeners—friends, really—as she told her stories—Alabama's stories. She preferred to tell in small groups but sometimes appeared on stage in front of thousands of friends or reached a National Public Radio listening audience.

Kathryn began her professional career after graduating from Huntingdon College, an all-girl Methodist school at the time, by applying at the *Montgomery Advertiser*. After being told that the editors were familiar with her work and would hire her if she were a man, she went home to work in her mother's insurance company and to write stories for other newspapers around the state. At the outset of World War II, she was hired as the police reporter at the *Advertiser's* sister paper, the *Alabama Journal*. Later she went on to the *Birmingham News* where she met her future husband, Amasa Windham. After turning him down the first time he asked for a date, she later acquiesced and they ended up happily married, had a family, and settled in Selma. She was widowed young and supported her three young children by writing for the newspaper in Selma.

In the 1960s, she started writing the books on Alabama's ghost stories



FIGURE 1

Kathryn Tucker Windham. (Photo by Steve Graubeger)

that would first give her a national audience. *13 Alabama Ghosts and Jeffrey* was the first of her series on Southern spirits. Around 1980, she worked with photographer John Reese on a National Humanities grant through the Birmingham Public Library to document the Gee's Bend community. Having worked in the area with the Agency for the Aging, Kathryn's history with this community aided her in these interviews with the residents. She loved the residents of this community as if they were family. I think they felt the same. It was easy to love Kathryn.

Her love of cemeteries led to her documenting a southwest Alabama African

American cemetery that included death masks made by a local artist. She loved picnicking in Live Oak Cemetery in Selma, her favorite. She often talked of visiting a cemetery and the peace she got from it.

She used her celebrity as a storyteller accomplished in the traditional craft of passing on family and community stories to advance her gentle message that everyone bears a responsibility for their family's stories as oral history. Kathryn expressed that "the storytelling I grew up with was relaxed, spontaneous, and natural, one of our favorite forms of entertainment." This was the Alabama Kathryn grew up in. It was the Alabama she took us to and the Alabama she asked us to maintain.

Kathryn disliked large crowds and electronic voice amplification, and preferred more intimate settings, maybe on a front porch or around a kitchen table with just a few friends. Yet her "front porch" grew to include international stages as well as local ones. Later in life she eschewed far-flung venues to tell stories in Jonesborough, Tennessee, Huntsville, Troy, and Selma, as well as her own dining room table. I found myself there many times listening as she shared so generously of her time, experience, and knowledge. While her stories were about many places, times, and people, she primarily drew from her day-to-day life in either her childhood hometown of Thomasville or her adopted home of Selma. She connected listeners to common life experiences and reflected her community's mores and traditions.

Kathryn was familiar to national audiences as perhaps the nation's best-known and finest storyteller through her public radio broadcasts on *All Things Considered* where she shared her personal stories of Alabama in her lilting Black Belt dialect. Listeners wrote her of their transport to other times and places, renewed spirits, and her helping them to find their way home. Alabamians recognized Kathryn Tucker Windham as the familiar voice of a grandmother and the embodiment of all that was good and true about Alabama.

As an Alabamian and her friend, I will always remember her for her generous spirit and talent in reminding Alabama residents of our culture and for presenting the Southern narrative tradition in such a graceful way to our nation. Kathryn, you will be missed. — BETTY ANN LLOYD ■

GAIL THROWER, 1943–2011

Gail Thrower, recipient of the 1992 Folk Heritage Award, died June 4, 2011. A member of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, she was a passionate advocate for the tribe and its cultural heritage. Much of her knowledge of Creek history, lore, and culture came from her grandfather, who was the last Poarch Creek medicine man. She built on this foundation in a number of ways, becoming a skilled maker of coiled pine needle baskets as well as developing a deep understanding of the tribe's foodways and uses of herbs and other plants. Her



FIGURE 1

Gail Thrower. (Photo courtesy of the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture)

painstaking genealogical research was an important part of the documentation required when the tribe gained federal recognition in 1984.

Thrower worked for the tribe for more than thirty years, serving as tribal historian/librarian. Her efforts to maintain cultural awareness among tribal members laid the groundwork for what is now the Calvin McGhee Cultural Management Authority. "She kept some type of museum going and provided cultural education. She believed in what she did," her son Robert Thrower Jr. told the *Atmore Advocate*. She was eager to help outsiders learn more about Creek culture and

history as well, participating in numerous festivals around the region, including the Alabama Folklife Festival and the Moundville Native American Festival. In addition, she served on the Poarch Creek Arts Council and the Alabama Indian Resource Center Advisory Board.

“She was a keeper of our culture,” her son said. “There are a number of us here now that are continuing her legacy through her work. We won’t let what she pioneered go away.”

Thrower’s legacy as a culture bearer is also documented in “Roots Running Deep: Picking Mayhaws” (*Tributaries* 7, 2007) This article, written by her daughter Lori A. Sawyer, describes their trip to gather mayhaws, the distinctively south Alabama fruit, for jelly making and explains the importance of the tradition within her family and the community. It was not long after Thrower’s recovery from a serious illness, and Sawyer quotes her reaction: “This has been the happiest day of my life since I’ve been sick. It’s so good to be part of this continuity. I feel connected to my momma and my daddy and to life . . .”

Thrower’s dedication to her community traditions and tribal culture inspired many to appreciate and seek out the continuities and connections in their own cultures. — DEB BOYKIN ■

ENOCH SULLIVAN, 1931–2011

Bluegrass gospel music pioneer Enoch Sullivan of St. Stephens (Washington County) died February 23, 2011, at the age of seventy-nine. He and his wife Margie performed together for more than sixty years as the legendary Sullivan Family Band.

Sullivan grew up near St. Stephens in a family of musicians who played for dances or “frolics” in neighbor’s homes on weekends. He began playing music at a young age, first learning guitar, then mandolin, then fiddle. When his father, Arthur Sullivan, experienced a religious conversion in 1939 and became a Pentecostal preacher, the family played only gospel music from then on.

Margie and Enoch met at a revival service in Sunflower, Alabama, in 1946 when she was thirteen and he was fifteen. Three years later the two married.



FIGURE 1

Margie and Enoch Sullivan. (Photo by Steve Grauberger)

Very soon after, they began performing with the Reverend Arthur Sullivan for a live radio program on WRJW in Picayune, Mississippi. Later they performed every Sunday for seven years on WPBB in Jackson, Alabama, and five mornings a week for another radio station in Thomasville. The group continued to play after Arthur Sullivan's death in 1957 and the 1993 death of Enoch's brother Emmett, who played banjo.

Over the years the Sullivan Family kept up a rigorous touring schedule performing at churches, festivals, and music stages all over the U.S., including numerous appearances at the Grand Ole Opry. They had the opportunity

to play with many notable figures in country and bluegrass, including “the Father of Bluegrass Music,” Bill Monroe. It is said that Monroe was the first to describe the Sullivans’ music as “bluegrass gospel.” They have been tireless ambassadors of this genre, publishing a quarterly newsletter, *Bluegrass Gospel News*, and hosting two festivals a year at their family campground and bluegrass park in St. Stephens. It was always clear that Enoch Sullivan regarded the family’s career as a ministry, in which they promoted not only their musical style, but the Christian faith that it expressed.

Along the way the Sullivans mentored a number of younger musicians who travelled with the band, such as country music artists Marty Stuart and Carl Jackson. Enoch Sullivan’s gift for working with young people and his desire to pass on his gospel music tradition to the next generation coincided with the goals of the Alabama State Council on the Arts’ Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program, in which he received support and recognition as a master artist.

The State Arts Council also presented Enoch and Margie Sullivan with the Alabama Folk Heritage Award in 2005, the state’s highest honor for the folk and traditional arts. The Sullivans have received many other awards and recognition, most significantly inductions into Bill Monroe’s Bluegrass Hall of Fame in Bean Blossom, Indiana, and the Old Time Country Music Hall of Fame in Anita, Iowa, and the Distinguished Achievement Award from the International Bluegrass Music Association. — ANNE KIMZEY ■

Contributors' Notes

WILLIAM S. (BILL) ALLEN is a retired psychiatric nurse living in Decatur. Although a fifth generation Alabamian on both sides, he spent many years of his adult life in other places. In 2004, he returned to Alabama to be closer to his family and his roots. Since retiring, he has pursued his interests in writing, genealogy, and “whatever else seems interesting.” Allen has published short stories and numerous book reviews. He is a 2006 graduate of the Alabama Community Scholars Institute and has done several projects for the Alabama Folklife Association. His current research project is Tennessee Valley Work Traditions.

EMILY BLEJWAS serves as network coordinator for the National Alliance for Rural Policy. During her seven years in Alabama, Blejwas worked for the Economic & Community Development Institute at Auburn University, where she researched civic engagement, rural development, and heritage tourism, and helped to develop an Alabama civil rights trail guide that is forthcoming from NewSouth Books. This *Tributaries* article is part of Blejwas's book exploring Alabama culture and history through the lens of its food traditions, forthcoming from the University of Alabama Press. The book also includes a companion curriculum guide written by Foster Dickson. Blejwas received a M.S. in Rural Sociology from Auburn University in 2006 and a B.A. in Religious Studies from Kenyon College in 2000. She lives in Massachusetts with her husband, Andrew, and their three sons.

DEBORAH BOYKIN is a folklife specialist with the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, where her research interests include Alabama music traditions, particularly bluegrass and Muscle Shoals music. She also contributes to the Alabama Arts Radio series and works with grants programs. Prior to joining

the ACTC staff, she worked in the education and cultural programs of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and served as Folk Arts Director at the Mississippi Arts Commission. She has curated exhibits and festival programs for the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, SouthArts, the Mississippi Arts Commission, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and the Mississippi Quilt Association.

JOEY BRACKNER is the director of the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, a department of the Alabama State Council on the Arts (ASCA). Since 1985, he has undertaken numerous special projects for ASCA including co-production of *Unbroken Tradition*, a film documentary on Alabama folk potter Jerry Brown, and the production of the book and CD *Spirit of Steel*. Brackner is the author of *Alabama Folk Pottery* (University of Alabama Press, 2006). A native of Fairfield, he received a B.A. in Anthropology from the University of Alabama at Birmingham in 1977 and an M.A. in Anthropology from the University of Texas at Austin in 1981.

VALERIE POPE BURNES is assistant professor of history and director of the Center for the Study of the Black Belt at the University of West Alabama. A 1999 graduate of Judson College, she is completing her dissertation on the civil rights movement in Perry County under the direction of Dr. David Carter at Auburn University. Along with her work in archival preservation and building preservation, Burnes practices traditional chair caning techniques to create awareness of this craft.

JOYCE CAUTHEN is director emeritus of the Alabama Folklife Association and one of Alabama's foremost scholars of traditional folk music. Best-known for her book, *With Fiddle and Well-Rosined Bow: Old-Time Fiddling in Alabama*, she also produced the documentary CDs *Possum Up A Gum Stump: Home, Field & Commercial Recordings of Alabama Fiddlers* and *John Alexander's Sterling Jubilee Singers of Bessemer, Alabama* and edited the book and CD *Benjamin Lloyd's Hymn Book: A Primitive Baptist Song Tradition*. Her most recent production is the CD *Bullfrog Jumped: Children's Folksongs from the Byron Arnold Collection* with its accompanying booklet and on-line teacher's guide.

ANNE KIMZEY is a folklife specialist at the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, a division of the Alabama State Council on the Arts (ASCA). She received her B.A. in Journalism from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where she also pursued graduate studies in folklore. For the past twenty-two years she has researched and documented a variety of Alabama's folk traditions and produced exhibits, radio programs, and publications. She manages ASCA's Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program and Literature Program.

JESSICA LACHER-FELDMAN has been with the W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library at The University of Alabama since 2000, first as the public and outreach services coordinator, and, since 2008, as named curator of rare books and special collections. She holds a B.A. in French Studies and History, an M.A. in History, and an M.L.S. with a concentration in Archives and Special Collections from the University at Albany-SUNY in Albany, New York. She was project manager for the award-winning digital project, *Publishers' Bindings Online, 1815–1930: The Art of Books* (bindings.lib.ua.edu) and specializes in exhibition development in archives and special collections library. Active in the Society of American Archivists, the Society of Alabama Archivists, and the Rare Books and Manuscripts Division of the American Library Association, Lacher-Feldman is responsible for literary collections, rare books, artists' books, music collections, and popular culture collections at the University of Alabama. She is a member of the executive board for the Alabama Folklife Association. She is active in several areas of textile arts including freehand embroidery, and loves to cook and entertain for friends. She lives in Tuscaloosa, with her husband and her dog, Astro.

BETTY ANN LLOYD, a Montgomery resident and Huntsville native, is a folklorist currently working in Alabama fiber arts. She always had a fondness for Kathryn's stories but became a friend over their mutual admiration of the Gee's Bend residents. With an undergraduate degree from Athens State University in Political Science, she has done work on the Masters level in Folk Studies at Western Kentucky University. As an avid fiber artist she works with local and state fiber artists to bring Alabama's fiber art community to the fore.

SYLVIA G. STEPHENS is a 2008 graduate of the Alabama Community Scholars Institute, a freelance writer, and a retired U.S. Air Force public affairs officer. She served as secretary of the Alabama Folklife Association 2009–10. Under the Alabama State Council on the Arts' Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program, Stephens studied and trained as an apprentice quilter with her mother, Mozell Benson, a 2001 National Heritage Fellow. Stephens is a 1977 Auburn University graduate with a B.A. in Journalism and a 1993 graduate of Troy University with an M.P.A. in Public Management. She resides in Opelika.

SUSAN THOMAS is an independent writer, researcher, archivist, and social worker living in Mobile. She holds an M.A. degree in Communication from the University of South Alabama and serves as archivist for Springhill Avenue Temple, the oldest Jewish congregation in the state. Her professional interests include oral history, foodways, Southern culture, and historical preservation. Her past projects with the Alabama Folklife Association have included conducting oral histories on Croatian stove-maker descendants in Clarke County and on the John Henry legend in the area around Leeds.

LINDA VICE is the director of the Southwest Alabama Tourism and Film Office. In 2007, she was Alabama's Tourism Employee of the Year. She is a member of the executive board of the Black Belt National Heritage Area Committee, vice president of the Alabama Scenic River Trail, a member of the boards of directors of the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation and the Alabama Folklife Association. She serves on the tourism and marketing committee of the Governor's Black Belt Commission and the Region 7 community development committee of the Alabama Rural Action Commission. She is a graduate of the state and national Your Town Programs, the National Trust for Historic Preservation's National Leadership Training, Leadership Alabama, and Leadership Clarke County, and has served as a Rotary Group Study Exchange member to the Orient. She has a strong interest in arts, culture, and heritage, serving as advisor to many local groups. She is a frequent public speaker, including at regional and national conventions. She specializes in community and nontraditional economic development.



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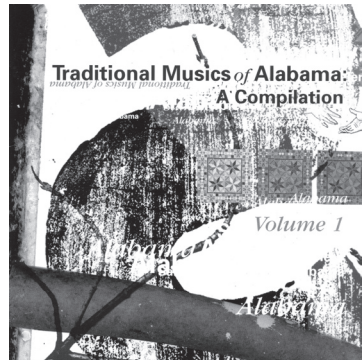
- Bullfrog Jumped!*** (\$17) is a collection of songs sung by mothers, grandmothers, school teachers, babysitters, and children across Alabama. During the summer of 1947 they sat at their kitchen tables and on their front porches

in front of a portable disc recorder and enthusiastically shared their favorite folksongs with Professor Byron Arnold, a “songcatcher.” They wanted children to learn them and sing them for many years to come. Forty-two of these folksongs and games are on this CD along with a 72-page booklet that contains the words to all of the songs and gives information about the singers.

- Sweet Is the Day: A Sacred Harp Family Portrait* (\$20 DVD or VHS, please specify) produced by Erin Kellen and directed by Jim Carnes. In this hour-long video members of the Wootten family of Sand Mountain speak of their long and deep involvement with shape-note singing and sing more than a dozen hymns from *The Sacred Harp*. An accompanying booklet provides historical information and further explanation of shape-note traditions.
- Tributaries, Journal of the AFA*, Vol. 1 (\$8). Contains essays on the shoal fish trap, Mobile Bay jubilees, quilting, occupational folklore, and more.
- Tributaries, Journal of the AFA*, Vol. 2 (\$8). Contains essays on Hank Williams, revival of interest in Indian tribal ancestry, Alabama’s outlaws, cultural roles of African-American women in the Wiregrass, and more.
- Tributaries, Journal of the AFA*, Vol. 3 (\$8). Contains essays on graveshelters, the Skyline Farms, the Piney Woods Regional Folklife Project, geophagy, and more.
- Tributaries, Journal of the AFA*, Vol. 4 (\$8). Contains essays on contemporary Christmas curb lights in Birmingham, Creek Indian migration narratives, the Ballad of John Catchings, and more.
- Tributaries, Journal of the AFA*, Vol. 5 (\$10). This special thematic issue contains essays on Alabama’s blues topics such as Butler “String Beans” May, Ed Bell, “Jaybird” Coleman, Willie King, Vera Ward Hall, and “John Henry.”
- Tributaries, Journal of the AFA*, Vol. 6 (\$8). Contains essays on Alabama’s first folklife celebration, “FolkCenter South,” family reunions, pre-Columbian highways, and more.
- Tributaries, Journal of the AFA*, Vol. 7 (\$8). Contains essays on picking

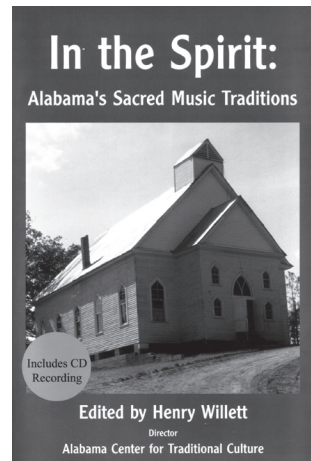
mayhaws, the literature of Ruby Pickens Tartt, Mobile's Mardi Gras, and more.

- *Tributaries, Journal of the AFA*, Vol. 8 (\$8). Contains essays on Mobile foodways, Sacred Harp singing, women blues singers, Birmingham's Mexican population, and more.
- *Tributaries, Journal of the AFA*, Vol. 9 (\$8). Essays on river redhorse snaring, heritage gardening, Pineywoods cattle, and the MOWA Choctaw of Alabama.
- *Tributaries, Journal of the AFA*, Vol. 10 (\$15). This double issue is devoted to linguistic traditions of Alabama.
- *Tributaries, Journal of the AFA*, Vol. 11 (\$10). Contains essays on John Henry, communes, and gandydancer John Mealing.
- *Tributaries, Journal of the AFA*, Vol. 12 (\$10). This special issue on sacred music contains essays on Birmingham gospel quartets, Camp Fasola, Wiregrass buildings for singing, Japheth Jackson, church music of Covington County, and the 7-shape gospel tradition.
- *The Traditional Musics of Alabama: A Compilation, Volume 1* (\$12.50). This CD is the first in the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture's Millennium Series, produced by Steve Grauberger. It presents a delightful and well-recorded variety of children's games, work songs, sacred music, fiddle tunes, blues and other forms of music traditional to Alabama collected by musicologists and folklorists over the last 50 years.
- *Traditional Musics of Alabama: Volume 3, 2002 National Sacred Harp Singing Convention* (\$12.50) This CD is the third in the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture's Millennium Series, produced by Steve Grauberger. Recorded June 14th 2002 at the National Sacred Harp Convention at Trinity United Methodist Church, Birmingham, Alabama. Program notes were written by John Bealle.



- *Traditional Musics of Alabama: Volume 4, Wiregrass Notes* (\$12.50) This CD is the fourth in the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture's Millennium Series, produced by Steve Grauberger. Recorded in 1980 in Ozark Alabama, by Brenda and Steve McCallum, this is a newly digitized and revised release originally produced by Hank Willett and Doris Dyen as the LP *Wiregrass Notes: Black Sacred Harp Singing From Southeast Alabama*. Included are the songs in the original release plus 13 additional songs taken from original event recordings.
- *The Traditional Musics of Alabama: Volume...5, "New-Book" Gospel Shape-Note Singing*. (\$17) This is the fifth CD in the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture's Millennium Series, produced by Steve Grauberger. Most tracks were recorded at annual Alabama State Gospel Singing Conventions or other associated gospel singing events. The CD highlights Alabama songwriters who submit their work to the various "New-Book" publications.
- *John Alexander's Sterling Jubilee Singers of Bessemer, Alabama*, (\$10). This cassette recording features Jefferson County's oldest African American *a cappella* gospel group.
- *Jesus Hits Like an Atom Bomb*, (\$16). CD version of the Sterling Jubilee cassette described above.
- *Cornbread Crumbled in Gravy: Historical Alabama Field Recordings from the Byron Arnold Collection of Traditional Tunes* (\$12.50). This box set includes a 64-page booklet and a cassette featuring field recordings of folk, gospel, and parlor tunes recorded in 1947.
- *Traditional Music from Alabama's Wiregrass* (\$10). A CD capturing bluegrass, gospel, blues, and Sacred Harp singing as done in Southeast Alabama.
- *The Alabama Sampler* (\$12). A CD featuring live performances at Birmingham's City Stages festival of the state's blues, bluegrass, Sacred Harp, gospel, railroad calls, etc.
- *Benjamin Lloyd's Hymn Book: A Primitive Baptist Song Tradition* (\$29.95 hardcover). A book of essays exploring Alabama's oldest hymnal, published in 1841, and enclosed CD with twenty songs.

- In the Spirit, Alabama's Sacred Music Traditions* (paperback book/CD, \$15): A dozen essays about such forms of religious music as "Dr. Watts singing," bluegrass gospel, gospel quartet singing, African-American Covenanters, shape-note and more. CD features examples of each.
- Judge Jackson and the Colored Sacred Harp* (Book/CD, \$29.95) This 160-page hard-bound book and CD by Joe Dan Boyd with an introduction by John Bealle tells the story of Judge Jackson of Ozark, Alabama, who in 1934 published *The Colored Sacred Harp*. It also describes the formation and rise to prominence of the Wiregrass Sacred Harp Singers, led by Dewey Williams and Japheth Jackson. The enclosed CD contains 2 historic recordings in which Judge Jackson participated and 23 others from *The Colored Sacred Harp* as well as the Cooper version of *The Sacred Harp*.



NON-AFA PRODUCTS OF RELATED INTEREST:

- Rich Amerson* (\$7 for cassette, \$10 for CD). Folk tales and songs recorded in Livingston, Alabama, in 1961.
- Possum Up a Gum Stump: Home, Field and Commercial Recordings of Alabama Fiddlers* (\$9 for cassette, \$15 for CD). Contains rare recordings of nineteenth-century fiddlers and field recordings of twentieth-century fiddlers who played in older styles. Twenty-four-page liner notes.
- The Colored Sacred Harp* (CD, \$16). The Wiregrass Sacred Harp Singers of Ozark, Alabama, sing from Judge Jackson's 1934 compilation of shape-note songs.
- Desire for Piety* (CD, \$16). A rare example of black Sacred Harp singing from rural southeast Alabama as sung by the Wiregrass Sacred Harp Singers.
- With Fiddle and Well-Rosined Bow* (paperback book, \$19.95) A social

history of old-time fiddling written by Joyce Cauthen.

- Allison's Sacred Harp Singers* (CD, \$13.50) Re-mastered selections of rare Sacred Harp recordings made in 1927-28 by singers from Birmingham.
- Religion Is a Fortune* (CD, \$13.50): Remastered commercial recordings of various Sacred Harp groups recorded in the 1920s and '30s.
- Lookout Mountain Convention* (CD,\$15) More than 30 songs from the 1960 edition of The Original Sacred Harp recorded at the Lookout Mountain Convention in August 1968.
- In Sweetest Union Join* (2 CDs, \$25) This 1999 recording commemorates the fortieth anniversary of Alan Lomax's historic Sacred Harp recording made in 1959.
- The Sacred Harp Hour, WCPC Sessions* (CD, \$15) Selections from Sunday morning radio show in Houston, Mississippi, on air since 1959.
- Spiritualaires of Hurtsboro, Alabama: Singing Songs of Praise* (CD, \$15) 16 songs by one of the last active gospel quartets with origins in gospel's golden age of the 1950s.