

## Traditional and Exotic: Florida Foodways



Sabal palms, or Swamp cabbage trees, grow especially well alongside the Caloosahatchee and other rivers throughout Florida. Patty Brant's article on swamp cabbage begins on page 6.

Photo:  
Dale Conyers,  
Moore Haven, FL.

# OPULENT DINING

“Exquisite Feasts” was a sort of captioned photomontage that appeared last Dec. 7 in *T*, the Style magazine of the *New York Times*. It reflected a growing public interest in dining customs of the fabulously rich and powerful. The teaser read, “From ornate confections to extravagant centerpieces, the mood is decadent, and the table is set.” The captions followed suit in a vein of juicy gossip— even when the names being dropped were centuries old. Readers learned that a steward named François Vatel was “driven to suicide” in 1671 under the pressure of preparing a banquet for the gluttonous King Louis XIV and hundreds of guests at the Château de Chantilly. They read that another impossibly gorgeous spread was set forth in Vienna in 1760, at the formal banquet held by the Hapsburg monarchy to celebrate the imperial wedding of Archduke Joseph of Austria to Isabella of Parma— but the “food was mostly for show, and not meant to be eaten”, the *Times* added breathlessly. Among the other mentions were Chanel Haute Couture’s Fall 2012 runway with its Indian banquet theme, and the English culinary historian Ivan Day’s recent recreation of a swan pie (an edible baked pie decorated with a stuffed swan) from a 1644 painting by David Teniers the Younger, “its pastry gilded, its wings fluffed up.”

## Repast

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Not to be outdone, the *Wall Street Journal* followed on Jan. 24 with “Time to (Really) Set the Table”, a feature by arts reviewer Julie Baumgardner. “In 1600,” she began, “the wedding of Marie de’ Medici and Henry IV, king of France, became the stuff of legend— and not simply because the epic banquet encompassed 50 courses. The real surprise came when the nearly 300 guests in attendance picked up their napkins and, in each case, a songbird flew out from beneath the folds.” Noting that “culinary happenings” are on the rise in American high society, the article went on to present table decoration ideas for these, inspired by recent art and design events and museum exhibits.

Ivan Day, mentioned above, has been commissioned to recreate a grand historical banquet this June to mark the bicentennial of the Battle of Waterloo. The event— scheduled at Apsley House, the London mansion where the (current) Duke of Wellington continues to reside— recreates aspects of the Waterloo Banquet that was held for dozens of British generals every June 18 from 1820 to 1852 to celebrate their victory in the great battle. Using a cookbook by Carême, Day plans to create, among other dishes:

- an ornamental *pain de gibier à la Parisienne*, made by roasting 10 rabbits and 10 partridges, puréeing the meat to make a *sauce allemande*, setting this with aspic in molds, removing these and scattering them with red and yellow jelly *croustons*, and displaying them atop *socles*, or plinths, decorated with gum paste
- two raised-pastry pies stuffed with *quenelles* and *rissoles* of duck, truffles fried in butter, crayfish and mushrooms in a thick rich veal stock, and then surmounted with scarlet crayfish held fast by *hâtelets* (decorated skewers)
- a *macedoine* of red fruits in strawberry jelly.

Perhaps all this French-inspired food in London clarifies who *really* won the Battle of Waterloo!

Two books last year also tapped into the fascination with the history of opulent dining:

- *A Royal Cookbook: Seasonal Recipes from Buckingham Palace* (Royal Collection Trust, 2014), co-authored by Mark Flanagan, Royal Chef at Buckingham Palace, and Edward Griffiths, Deputy Master of the Royal Household, is being distributed stateside by the Univ. of Chicago Press. It includes a summary history of British royal dining as far back as the late 14<sup>th</sup>-Century reign of Richard II (whose master cook compiled *The Forme of Curye*), a description of the royal kitchens today, and 13 recipes grouped by season, such as Paupiette of Sole with Watercress Mousse, or Roasted Loin of Balmoral Venison.
- *High Society Dinners: Dining in Tsarist Russia* (Prospect Books, 2014), originally published in Russia in 1996, has been translated into English by Marian Schwartz and edited for western readers by Darra Goldstein. The co-authors were the late cultural historian Yuri Lotman (Univ. of Tartu, Estonia) and his former student Jelena Pogosjan, who now teaches at the Univ. of Alberta. The work reproduces nine months of menus and guest lists from the 1857-8 household book belonging to Petr Durnovo, Adjutant-General of the Tsar’s Imperial Suite in St. Petersburg. Exemplary dishes include turtle soup, stuffed pike-perch, meatballs in sour cream, goose with apples, and roast hazel grouse. There are also many foreign borrowings, such as Windsor soup (beef, root vegetables, cream, and macaroni), French-style peas, and Vienna torte. Each day’s menu is enhanced with commentary from the editors and relevant extracts from letters, diaries, and newspapers, so that the material becomes a window into the aristocratic life of the imperial class. ■



# A REVIEW OF SOME FLORIDA COOKBOOKS

by Pam Dishman

*Pam Dishman of LaPorte, IN, has been a member of CHAA since 2005. She grew up in northern Ohio and earned a B.S. degree in pharmacy at Ohio Northern Univ. and an M.S. in industrial pharmacy at Purdue Univ. In her career in the pharmaceutical industry she spent some years mixing and flavoring new product formulations, and additional time working as a technical writer. Now retired, she enjoys developing her own recipes for dishes from all over the world, and is currently editing a community cookbook for the LaPorte chapter of AAUW.*

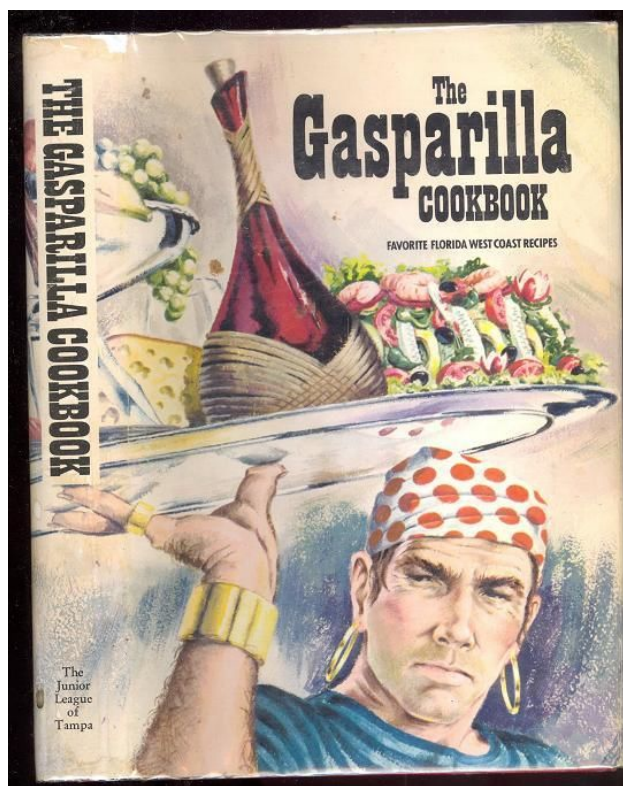
As a child growing up in a town north of Dayton, I always enjoyed “mixing up stuff” in the kitchen. My mother didn’t particularly enjoy cooking, and so my brother and I began to learn to make dishes by ourselves, and that’s how we became interested in food. Although I entered the pharmaceutical industry rather than the food industry, I have continued to develop my own recipes and have also collected a few hundred cookbooks from across the country and around the world.

My collection includes a pretty good variety of Florida books and booklets. I have examined these for the most interesting information and recipes, and have been able to test some of the recipes myself.

## The Gulf Coast

One of my favorite Florida cookbooks is *The Gasparilla Cookbook: Favorite Florida West Coast Recipes* (Tampa, FL: Hillsboro Printing Co., 1961), compiled by the Junior League of Tampa. It is filled with delicious-sounding recipes that make a person feel like heading to the kitchen to cook. On the dust jacket, Clementine Paddleford described it as “the best book I have ever seen done by any local group.” It was also highly praised by *Gourmet*, *McCall’s*, and other magazines. It covers Tarpon Springs (settled by Greeks), Clearwater, St. Petersburg, Tampa and its Ybor City section (Cuban), and Sarasota. The book’s title is a reference to Tampa’s yearly Gasparilla Festival, a Mardi-Gras-like celebration deriving its name from a pirate whose ship had supposedly been anchored in the area.

*The Gasparilla Cookbook* has an excellent chapter of appetizer recipes, and features many crab and shrimp dishes. Some recipes of interest are Louis Pappas’s Greek salad (an elaborate potato salad), *bolitos* (fritters of black-eyed peas), Spanish bean soup (a tasty soup of garbanzos, potatoes, and *chorizo*), shrimp with yellow rice, Cuban sandwiches, and guava pie.



## Key West

Moving down the coast, we come to exotic, laid-back Key West. There is an interesting small booklet, *Key Kookin’* (self-published, c. 1965), by the owner of the Pigeon Patio restaurant, Glad Whitely. It includes, for example, a recipe for cauliflower with avocado sauce, an orange sauce for fish, and several Cuban recipes.

A much more comprehensive source for information about this area is Linda Gassenheimer’s *Keys Cuisine: Flavors of the Florida Keys* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1991). The book explains how the Keys came to be settled by British Loyalists of the American Revolution who had fled first to the Bahamas, as well as by Cubans and Southerners. It features a large selection of tropical cocktails, many seafood dishes, and a whole chapter of Key lime recipes.

Gassenheimer, who has been writing the “Dinner in Minutes” column for *The Miami Herald* since 1988, includes many innovative dishes created by chefs of the region using local ingredients. Some exemplary seafood recipes are those for conch fritters, grouper chowder, conch chowder, yellowtail with Key lime butter, Key West shrimp boil, and sour orange grouper. The wild Florida sour orange is a variety of bitter orange closely related to the Seville orange or *bigarade* of the Mediterranean (which is traditionally used to make marmalade). It was introduced from Spain and is found in parts of Florida and the Bahamas.

A booklet titled *Favorite Florida Recipes* (York, PA: Wellspring, 1987) by Nancy Berzinec offers recipes for conch puffs, stone-crab claws, yellowtail with Key limes, red snapper in foil, pompano Dijon, and grapefruit cake.

*continued on next page*

# FLORIDA COOKBOOKS *continued from page 3*

More Key West recipes are found in *The Florida Cookbook: From Gulf Coast Gumbo to Key Lime Pie* (New York: Knopf, 1993) by Jeanne Voltz and Caroline Stuart. Two examples are guava duff, a steamed pudding originated by British settlers from the Bahamas; and Nassau breakfast, a fish “steam” (stew) made by layering sliced onions and limes with fish fillets, simmering in water, and serving over grits with Old Sour (an aged mixture of lime juice and salt). This is an excellent book, with the recipes organized by region. It incorporates a lot of explanatory text, some on almost every page. Other good recipes include Cuban bread, Cuban roast pork, swamp cabbage (hearts of palm) prepared “Cracker style”, and sour orange pie. Voltz, an Alabama native, was the Homemaking Editor at *The Miami Herald* in the 1950s, while Stuart was a Florida native who went on to serve as an assistant to James Beard in New York.

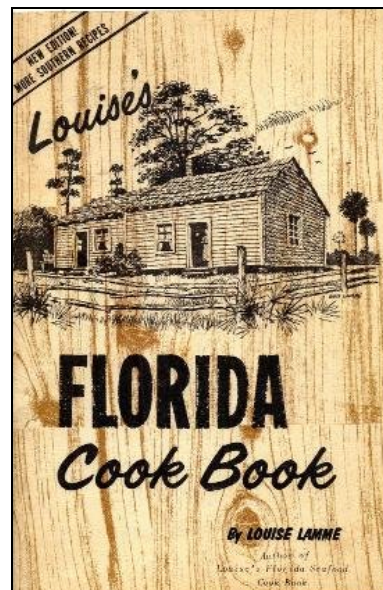


## Fromajardis

*Pam has not yet tested this recipe, which is from Louis Carlton's Famous Florida Recipes.*

- rich pie dough
- pinch of nutmeg
- ½ lb. aged cheddar cheese
- 4 well-beaten eggs
- ⅛ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. powdered cayenne pepper (or ½-1 tsp. minced datil pepper, if available)

Prepare pie dough, blending in nutmeg. Roll dough thin. Cut in 8-10 rounds, each the size of a saucer. On one half of each round, cut a cross. Grate cheese. Beat in eggs, salt, and cayenne. Place one spoonful of mixture on unslashed half of each dough circle. Fold to make half-circle; pinch edges together. Brush with melted butter. Bake in oven at 375° F. until golden brown. Cheese will puff up through the cross. Serve with Florida orange wine.



## Hearts of Palm Salad (Savory)

*Adapted from Louise Lamme, Louise's Florida Cook Book.*

- 2 14-oz. cans hearts of palm
- 1½ cups cooked crawfish meat
- ⅔ cup diced celery
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 2 Tbsp. snipped chives
- ¼ tsp. black pepper
- 2 tsp. lemon juice

Drain and slice hearts of palm. If using thawed frozen crawfish meat, drain off fat (and save for another use if desired); blot dry between paper towels. Gently fold ingredients together with rubber spatula. Chill. Serves 4-5.

*See page 7 for two more hearts of palm recipes accompanying the article by Patty Brant.*

## The Gold Coast

*Famous Florida Recipes: 300 Years of Good Eating* (St. Petersburg, FL: Great Outdoors Pub. Co., 1972), by Louis Carlton, is an outstanding booklet packed with information about each region of Florida and its history. Its history of the Gold Coast region of the Atlantic seaboard, which extends from Palm Beach County southward to Miami-Ft. Lauderdale, explains that wealthy socialites were attracted to the resort of Palm Beach after it, as well as a railway to the area, were established by industrialist Henry M. Flagler in the late 1800s. Miami Beach was settled by Southerners, some Cubans, and Northerners. One of the nation's largest Jewish communities began growing there; by 1947, almost half of the population was Jewish. A flood of Cuban refugees started arriving after Fidel Castro came to power in 1959.

Carlton, who was Homemaking Editor at *The Miami Herald* during the 1960s, gathered her recipes from all over Florida and arranged them by region. They include Passover jelly roll, cream of avocado soup, Key lime pie, pompano amandine, pioneer pot



## Red Snapper Amandine

2 red snapper fillets  
flour, salt and pepper to dredge fillets  
butter (or oil) to sauté fillets  
1/3 cup sliced almonds  
3 Tbsp. butter  
2 tsp. lemon juice

Dip fish in flour and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Sauté in butter (or oil) until nicely done and browned, about 15 minutes. Meanwhile, lightly brown almonds in butter; stir in lemon juice, heat, and pour over fish. Serves 2.

## Key Lime Pie

*Because of the use of raw egg yolks, this uncooked pie should probably be avoided by diners with compromised immune systems.*

3 egg yolks  
14-oz. can sweetened condensed milk  
6 Tbsp. Key lime juice

Beat egg yolks until thick. Blend in condensed milk. Gradually add juice and beat until thickened. Pour into baked 8-inch pie crust or graham-cracker crumb crust. Chill until firm. (This is sometimes topped with meringue or whipped cream.) Serves 6.

Note from Pam: I prefer to make this pie with the graham-cracker crumb crust because its sweetness is needed to offset the intense tanginess of the Key lime juice. To make 6 Tbsp. of juice, it has taken me as many as 37 green or 11 yellow (ripe) Key limes, each 1 1/4 inches in diameter.

roast, and “gaspachee” from Pensacola, a salad version of gazpacho made with chopped tomatoes, cucumbers, green peppers, hardtack or pilot bread, and mayonnaise.

## Northern Florida

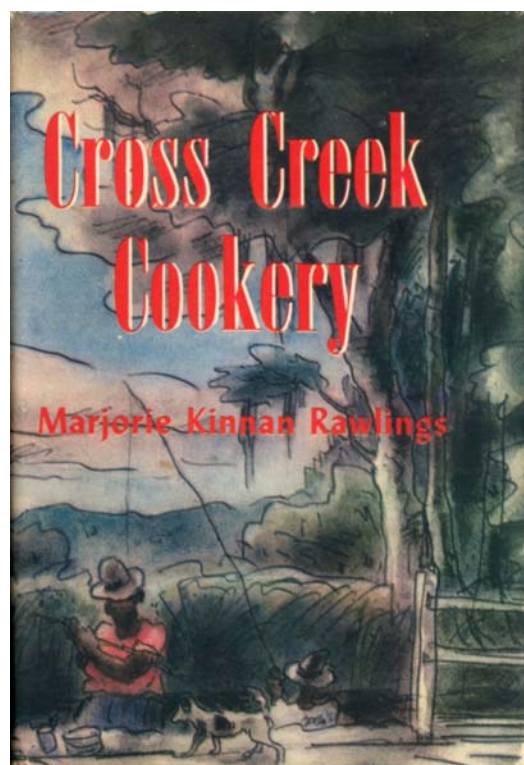
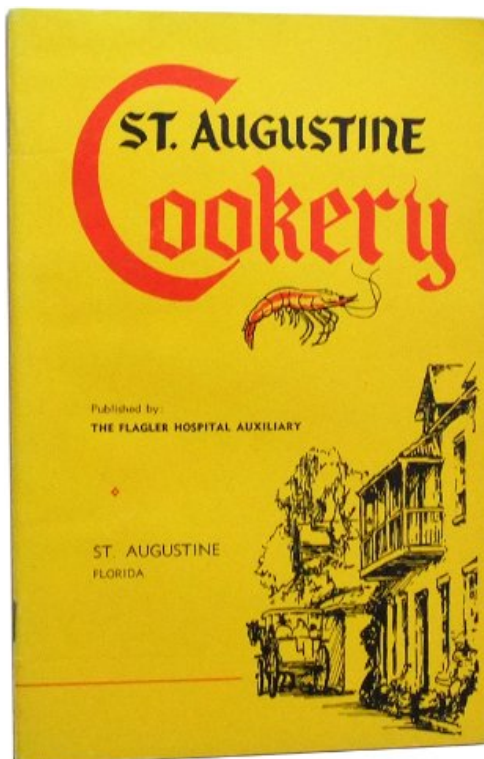
Another good booklet, *Louise's Florida Cook Book* (Boynton Beach, FL: Star Press, 1968; Spanish translation by the same publisher, 1976), by Louise Lamme, has very appealing recipes from all over Florida, including Spanish and Cuban dishes, many seafood dishes, and a few Seminole Indian dishes. Some good recipes include Pensacola gumbo, chicken perlow, pompano fish pie, stuffed whole red snapper, fresh coconut pie, and papaya pie.

The just-mentioned chicken perlow, the aforementioned sour orange and Key lime, and the gumbo and gaspachee of Pensacola, are examples of early Mediterranean influences on Florida cuisine. Perlow (also spelled perloo or pilau) is a rice dish introduced to the South by settlers from Spain and southern France; it ultimately traces back to the Persian and Turkish *pilav* or pilaf.

Other examples of early Mediterranean influence are visible in St. Augustine, the oldest city in North America, founded by the Spanish exactly 450 years ago in 1565. People of many nationalities ended up settling there, including Spaniards from the island of Minorca in the 1700s. Many of their dishes contain the hot datil pepper, which local lore claims Minorcans introduced to the area.

A fundraising cookery booklet, *St. Augustine Cookery* (St. Augustine, FL: Flagler Hospital Auxiliary, 1965), provides recipes for crab and avocado soup as well as several Minorcan specialties such as *fromajardis* (savory cheese pastries distributed at Easter), crispees (round cinnamon pastries served at the same time), Minorcan shrimp pilau, datil pepper vinegar, and Christmas coconut candy. There are also many other shrimp recipes.

*continued on page 7*



# SWAMP CABBAGE: IT'S NOT EASY, BUT IT'S WORTH IT

by Patty Brant

*Patty Brant is Editor of the Caloosa Belle Newspaper in LaBelle, Florida.*

**T**he Swamp Cabbage Festival is an annual event in the town of LaBelle, located in southern Florida east of Fort Myers. It is held during the last full weekend of February at Barron Park, on the Caloosahatchee River.

At the heart of the festival is the Sabal Palm, a species of palmetto palm better known as the Swamp Cabbage Tree. The Sabal Palm was selected by the State Legislature in 1953 as the State Tree of Florida. Grown throughout the state, the tree is cold-resistant and well-suited for a variety of landscape uses.

But there is another side to this wonderful plant. The bud, or new growth of the tree, can be harvested for food after the tree matures to about 12-20 feet in height. The bud is about three feet in length and is known as swamp cabbage. History recalls it being a staple of the Indian and early settlers' diet, along with the tree being a source of building material. The swamp cabbage, or hearts of palm, can be eaten raw, or cooked in a variety of forms.

The harvesting of the cabbage is best done as a team effort. Harvesting is a hot and tireless job, but it is made easier by a good crew working together—and the knowledge of the good eating waiting at the end of the day. First, a pair of spotters goes ahead of the rest to identify the trees and to cut away the fan-shaped leaves from the top of the tree. The next person through is the cutter. It is his job to cut the three-foot bud from the top of the tree with a chain saw. After the buds are dropped on the ground, a team of “booters” comes along and strips the outer covering of decayed leaf stalks, called “boots”, that are wrapped around the trunk. There are several layers of these boots that must be carefully removed before reaching the swamp-cabbage heart.

The cabbage is then cut into bite-size pieces and is ready for preparation in any number of ways (see recipes at right and on page 4). Because of the natural seeding process, each swamp-cabbage tree that is cut for food will be replaced by a new one. The new tree will yield swamp cabbage in about three to five years. ■



## Swamp Cabbage Salad (Sweet)

1 swamp cabbage (tender), chopped  
2-3 apples, chopped  
1 can crushed pineapple and juice  
1 small can coconut  
1 cup mayonnaise  
2 Tbsp. raisins  
chopped pecans (optional)  
squeeze of lemon

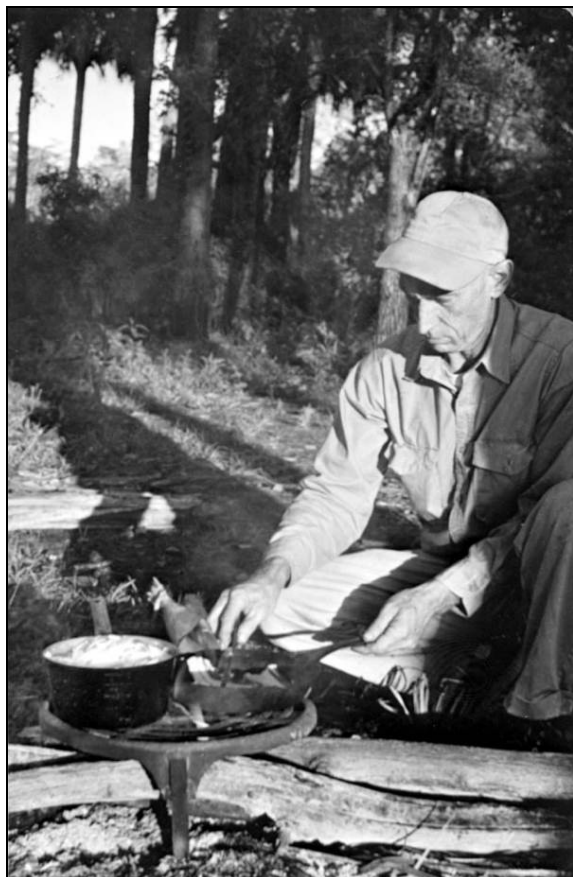
Toss and serve.

## Swamp Cabbage Cooked with Hickory Smoked Bacon

An article by Alice Feinstein, “Swamp Cabbage: Southern Florida Native with a Heart of Pure Palm” (Scripps Howard News Service, July 23, 1987), included a description of the most traditional way of preparing freshly harvested swamp cabbage, as related by Warren Kendall. Kendall, a resident of Jensen Beach on the Atlantic coast of Florida, declined to take credit for the recipe, insisting: “It belongs to the people of Florida.” The article summarized his instructions as follows:

The tree selected for eating shouldn't be too big, nor should it grow too near the water or the heart will be bitter. When you cut out the heart, which is in the segment just below the base of the leaves, peel back the outer layers with a knife until you reach the part you can break with your fingers. That's the tender part that is sweet and edible. Clean it right away and keep it in cold water until you're ready to cook it or the dish will turn green instead of being white as it should be, Kendall warned. Fry some hickory smoked bacon or fatback in a pot, then brown onions in the fat. Put in the swamp cabbage, broken into bite-sized pieces. Add water until it's level in the pot with the swamp cabbage. Bring the water to a boil and cook the swamp cabbage until it's tender [three to four hours].





Above, Everglades guide George L. Espenlaub prepares a pot of swamp cabbage in this photo from the 1950s.

(Photo: State Archives of Florida via the Florida Memory website, image no. PR12564)



At left, Thelma Driver of Lafayette County in northern Florida prepares a heart of palm in this photo from the town of Mayo on July 27, 1983. She's using a sharp knife to remove the remaining tough outer layers, then slicing and chopping the edible white flesh and placing the pieces in a bowl of cool water to prevent their discoloration.

(Photo by Nancy Nusz, held by the State Archives of Florida; accessed via the Florida Memory website, image no. FS84473)

## FLORIDA COOKBOOKS *continued from page 5*

The last three books that I will review also provide recipes from northern Florida. *Cross Creek Cookery* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942) was written by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, the Pulitzer-winning author of the novel *The Yearling* (1938). A transplanted Northerner, Rawlings lived in a rural hamlet near Gainesville and had an ocean cottage near St. Augustine. In this book, her sense of humor and love of good food are apparent. Some interesting recipes are St. Augustine deep-fried shrimp, camp-style swamp cabbage, poke weed Cross Creek, grapefruit and avocado salad, mango ice cream, and orange cake with orange filling. Poke weed, a traditional "poverty dish" of the South and Appalachia, is made by boiling the plant's leaves repeatedly to remove toxins; in this recipe, the greens are then placed on toast, topped with a rich cream sauce, and served with bacon.\*

Ernest Matthew Mickler grew up near St. Augustine in Palm Valley, a swampy area populated by many poor white Southerners of the type referred to as rednecks, Crackers, or "white trash". The recipes in his book *White Trash Cooking* (Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 1986) are filled with humor, as are some of their titles. He states that in comparison to soul food, white trash food isn't so highly seasoned or greasy or overcooked; chief ingredients are saltmeat, cornmeal, and molasses. I have always thought that the photo section alone is worth the price of the book—it takes the reader to the inside of private homes and even their refrigerators. Typical recipes are shrimp perlow, chicken stew, sweet-potato pone, cracklin corn pone, bucket dumpling (blackberry), and "likker puddin". This last is a pudding of sweet potato, cinnamon, and almonds, baked for two hours and then drenched with whiskey.

Janis Owens's *The Cracker Kitchen: A Cookbook in Celebration of Cornbread-Fed, Down-Home Family Stories and Cuisine* (New York: Scribner, 2009) is also written with a great deal of humor and is filled with anecdotes. It does a good job of explaining Cracker origins and culture, but I found the choice of recipes to be somewhat disappointing. The author, who lives near Gainesville, included many recipes that are used all over the U.S., and she added modern touches to some of the others. One interesting feature is the chapter of "roadkill" dishes. The book includes recipes for fried rabbit, catfish stew, fried catfish, hushpuppies, fried greens, and hearts of palm (swamp cabbage) salad.

Now that our tour of the state is complete, you might like to try one of the accompanying tasty Florida recipes.

\* Editor's note: as mentioned in our "Morsels and Tidbits" column of Spring 2014, in her book *Cooking in Other Women's Kitchens: Domestic Workers in the South, 1865-1960*, Rebecca Sharpless pointed out that most of the recipes in Rawlings's book should have been credited to her African-American cook, Idella Parker. ■

# ZORA NEALE HURSTON ON LOWDOWN FLORIDIAN FOOD AND CULTURE

by Frederick Douglass Opie

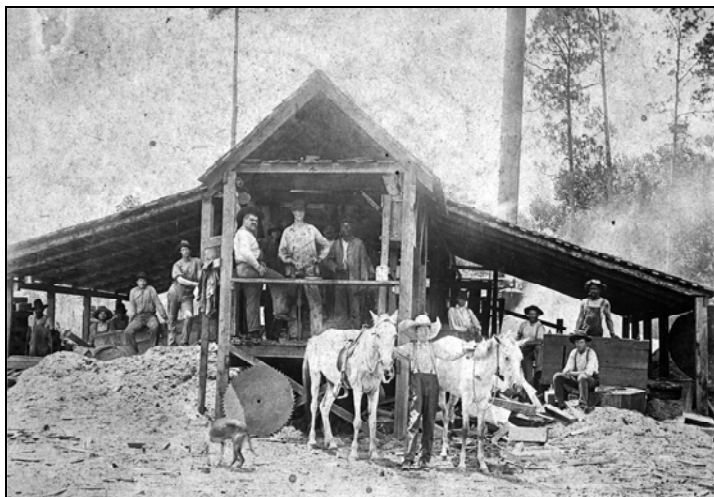
*Dr. Fred Opie is a Professor of History and Foodways at Babson College, in the Greater Boston area. He produces the “Breaking Bread” podcast, edits the blog foodasalens.com, and is a contributor on the radio show “The Splendid Table”. Dr. Opie is the author of several books, including Hog and Hominy: Soul Food from Africa to America (2010). His latest book is Zora Neale Hurston on Florida Food (2015), an essential read for lovers of history, cooking, and eating. For more on his work, visit <http://www.fredopie.com>.*

Just as the sun set one evening around 1910, Zora Neale Hurston’s Uncle Jim cut across the orange grove down to Joe Clark’s general store to purchase “a quart of peanuts and two stalks of sugar cane” on his way to a romantic interlude with a woman at a little house in the woods where there lived “a certain transient light of love.” Hurston’s Aunt Caroline saw her husband sneak off and “kept right on ironing until he had gotten as far as the store.” Then she put on her shoes, went out in the yard, and retrieved an axe that she slung across her shoulder before starting to follow him. The men on the store porch gave

Uncle Jim a laughing sendoff because they knew where he was headed. After all, he purchased the courting food at the store in plain sight. They had no opportunity to warn Uncle Jim. No one expected murder, but they knew trouble would come. About an hour later, when it was pitch-black night, they saw Uncle Jim dodging from tree to tree in his white, one-piece long drawers (underwear), hop over Clarke’s strawberry patch fence, and head toward his house where he disappeared. Aunt Caroline emerged from the dark and passed in front of the store. She now carried Uncle Jim’s clothes and the two stalks of sugar cane on the axe, which was still over her shoulder. She said, “Good evening, gentlemen,” and kept walking home. “The porch rocked with laughter. When they asked Uncle Jim later how his wife got into the lady’s house, he smiled bitterly and said, ‘Dat axe was her key... Oh, dat old stubborn woman I married, you can’t teach her nothing. I can’t teach her no city ways at all.’”<sup>1</sup>

Born in 1891 in Alabama, Zora Neale Hurston grew up in Eatonville, Florida, a small town that was founded in 1887. Hurston remained in Eatonville, the oldest all-black township in the United States, until about 1917.<sup>2</sup> She would later graduate from Barnard College in New York and begin a career as an anthropologist doing fieldwork in the South, including in her home state of Florida and later in the Caribbean. Hurston did for Florida what William Faulkner did for Mississippi— provide insights into a state’s culture.

A prolific writer in various genres, Hurston would publish novels, short stories, and plays based on extensive fieldwork she conducted among laborers in sawmills, phosphate mines, turpentine and railroad camps, and fruit and vegetable groves and/or plantations. Hurston’s fieldwork and observations in Eatonville, other rural communities, and work camps tell us a lot about the relationship between food, sex, and courtship among rural Southern blacks in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Food also plays a critical role in creating group identity, seducing and courting someone, and like alcohol, providing a temporary means of escape from the challenges of daily life.

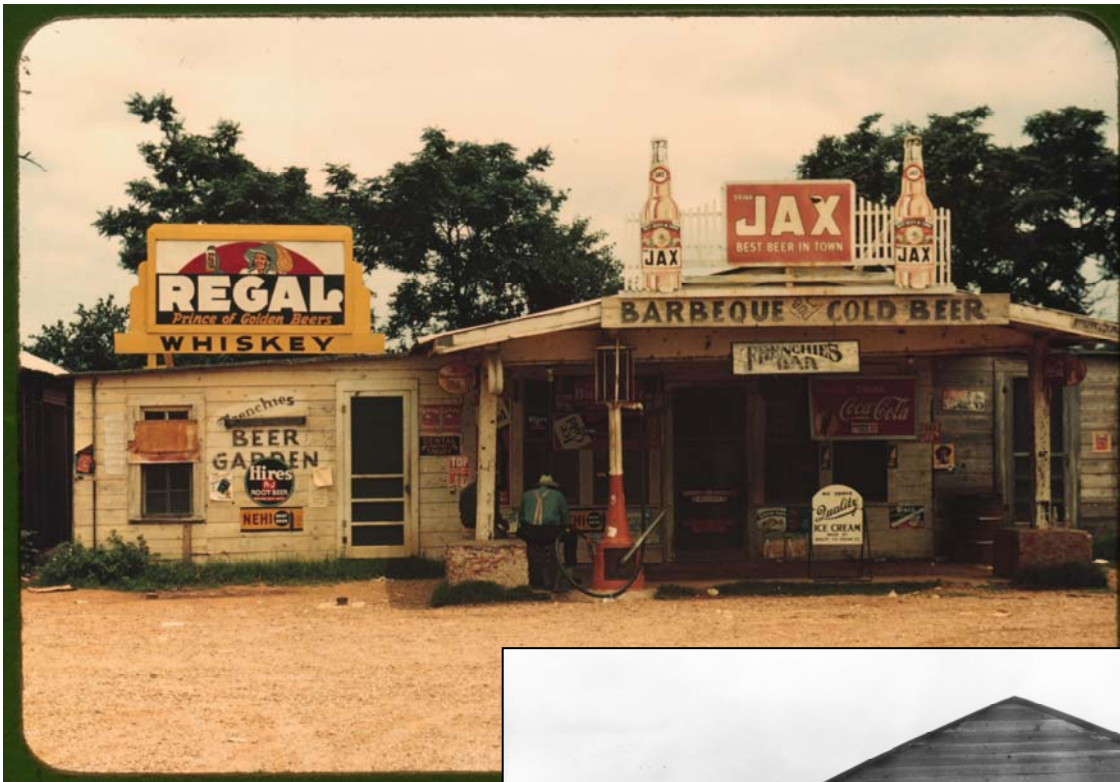


A sawmill in Pasco County, FL, ca. 1900.  
(Photo: State Archives of Florida via the  
Florida Memory website, image no. PR05063)



Payday for vegetable workers near Homestead, FL, 1939.  
(Photo by Marion Post Wolcott [1910-1990], held by  
Library of Congress, call no. LC-USF33- 030491-M1)





At left, a juke joint in Melrose, LA, 1940.

(Photo by Marion Post Wolcott [1910-1990], held by Library of Congress, call no. LC-USF35-113)

Below, jugs of moonshine and distillery equipment in Jacksonville, FL, 1930s.

(Photo: State Archives of Florida via the Florida Memory website, image no. RC07585)



### Work Camps and Groves

In the 1920s, large numbers of migrants from across the South had settled in work camps and groves in Florida. Work camps and groves were where interregional migrant working-class communities developed.

One reason was that work camps were places that Hurston describes as having “plenty of men and women who are fugitives from justice” working for employers desperate for hired help who, therefore, asked no questions about a person’s past as long as they could do the work.<sup>3</sup> For people with criminal records, work camps and agricultural labor provided job opportunities that legitimate businesses and/or employers in their home region would not offer them. The labor market in these places remained good for blacks because whites refused to do this work.

In the 1920s and 1930s, laborers in these places also had a greater degree of freedom from traditional Victorian courtship etiquette and societal norms than in communities like Eatonville that had established courting rituals and expected fidelity within marriage that spouses, family members, friends, and religious leaders expected and policed. Their stories, so often ignored by scholars, suggest both the different class- and gender-based courting rituals that existed across the traditionally more conservative South and the degree in which men and women carved out a measure of autonomy within otherwise oppressive living and working conditions.

### Juke Joints and Parties

The places where people engaged in these romantic and courtship rituals also helped form this group’s identity. The people we do not eat, drink, or dance with are the same people we avoid having sex with, because, like sex, food increases one’s group and cultural identity.<sup>4</sup> As with politicians who do stumping and eating events in which they treat voters to free refreshments to gain their support, similarly, men used food and drink to court women.

Hurston shows that laborers commonly organized guitar-driven dances outside of their sleeping quarters on paydays. In the light of huge bonfires made with faulty logs and slabs of wood, men and women danced the buck, belly rub, and the ole square dances. They became drunk on a moonshine-like drink known as “coon-dick”, so called because men often transported bottles of it secretly in the crotch of their pants. Especially popu-

*continued on next page*

# LOWDOWN CULTURE *continued from page 9*

lar in Polk County, FL, it was made out of “grape fruit juice, corn meal mash, beef bones, and a few mo’ things.”<sup>5</sup>

Workers also feasted on “parched peanuts, fried rabbit, fish, chicken, and chitterlings.”<sup>6</sup>

## Fried Chicken

1 Chicken  
Flour  
Salt  
Pepper

Cut the chicken up, separating every joint, and wash clean. Salt and pepper it, and roll into flour well. Have your fat very hot, and drop the pieces into it, and let them cook brown. The chicken is done when the fork passes easily into it. After the chicken is all cooked, leave a little of the hot fat in the skillet; then take a tablespoon of dry flour and brown it in the fat, stirring it around, then pour water in and stir till the gravy is as thin as soup.<sup>7</sup>

## Florida Fried Fish

Small fish (we dress whole)  
or Large fish (we bone and fillet)  
Salted Cornmeal

Pan-broiled fish are good, but in backwoods Florida we have lusty tastes ... [W]e like to dip them in salted cornmeal and drop them in deep, very hot fat. The cornmeal makes a crisper crust than the more delicate flour, and we happen to like it. With fried fish we like to serve hush-puppies, fried in the fish fat itself. The combination may not appeal to the too delicate of stomach, but I pray that this compendium of dishes shall not fall into the hands of any such, lest they perish either of disgust or frustration.<sup>8</sup>

## Chitterlings with Pickle Sauce Recipe

Makes six servings

1 lemon, peeled and cut in pieces  
1 small Bay leaf  
2 whole cloves  
½ cup white vinegar  
2 cloves garlic, chopped  
1 tablespoon hot sauce  
2 1 lb. 2 oz. cans Chitterlings

Combine lemon, Bay leaf, cloves, wine vinegar, garlic, and hot sauce; simmer for 15 min. Drain and rinse chitterlings. Cut into very small pieces and add to pickle sauce. Heat for 10 min. and serve.<sup>9</sup>

Considering such evidence through the lens of food history, I argue that sexual dancing with someone who could jook to jazz— meaning “shake like jelly all over ... and be so broad”, drink copious amounts of moonshine and still hold their liquor, enjoy good food, and satisfy one’s sexual urges— represented one of the many indicators of group identity among working-class migrant laborers in the 1920s and 1930s South.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to a place for food and courting, juke joints (sometimes spelled jukejoints) and outdoor parties, both of which featured jazz and blues music, also served as getaways and havens from employers. They functioned as what I call *entertainment maroons* that provided escape from the harsh realities of work in the sawmill, mining, and turpentine camps and the agricultural industries in the Jim Crow South.<sup>11</sup>

Enslaved Africans from the Wolof (Senegal and Gambia) and Bambara (Mali) empires introduced the term “juke” (sometimes spelled jook), meaning “wicked” or “disorderly”, to the colonial South. In Wolof, the word is *dzug* and in Bambara, it is *dzugu*. Over time, African Americans used the term to describe wicked places or moves. As Southern blacks linked the term jook with shacks, houses, barns, makeshift night clubs, and dancing, it became closely associated with more formal structures serving liquor and food, and producing live or recorded dance music. Recorded music, they said, came from a jook or jook box. Southern African-Americans also coined the term honky-tonk, which literally meant a segregated white shack (or jook joint) where rural whites drank similar liquor but listened to country music instead of African-American jazz.<sup>12</sup>

Historian Pete Daniel describes this kind of pleasure-seeking culture practiced by working-class, migrant, single men and women as “lowdown culture”.<sup>13</sup> These men and women entered work camps and groves in search of housing and employment and had plenty of time for lowdown culture, which became synonymous with drinking, gambling, eating special-occasion food, and sexual activity. Hurston’s description of a jook joint in Polk County, Florida in the late 1920s is a case in point:

## The Jook

Jook is the word for a Negro pleasure house ... where the men and women dance, drink, and gamble. Often it is a combination of all these. In past generations the music was furnished by “boxes”, another word for guitars. ... Musically speaking, the Jook is the most important place in America. For in its smelly, shoddy confines has been born the secular music known as blues, and on blues has been founded jazz. ... The Negro dances circulated over the world were also conceived inside the Jooks. The Negro social dance is slow and sensuous. The idea in the Jook is to gain sensation, and not so much exercise. So that just enough foot movement is added to keep the dancers on the floor. A tremendous sex stimulation is gained from this. But who is trying to avoid it? The man, the woman, the time, and the place have met.<sup>14</sup>



Living quarters and  
juke joint for  
migratory workers,  
Belle Glade, FL,  
1941.

(Photo by Marion Post  
Wolcott [1910-1990],  
held by Library of  
Congress, call no.  
LC-USF35-173)



### Excessive Drinking

As discussed, camp workers, the majority of them migrants, spent many leisure hours in juke joints that served as social outlets and entertainment maroons that allowed men and women to escape, relax, and court. The drinking that happened in juke joints provided what historian Frederick H. Smith calls “an alcoholic marronage, a temporary relief from social inequalities, which probably hindered organized efforts to resist” labor exploitation.<sup>15</sup>

Several scholars have discussed the meaning of excessive drinking. Smith argues that poor working and living conditions, frustrations, anxieties, and a lack of occupational fulfillment led to excessive drinking in the Caribbean.<sup>16</sup> Other historians have interpreted excessive drinking among foreign immigrant agricultural workers on plantations in Hawaii as an attempt to escape the reality of years of separation from family and community.<sup>17</sup> One sees similar trends in the South with the overconsumption of alcohol and rich food and the overindulgence in sex.

### A Means of Escape

Food, sex, and courtship also provided a temporary means of escape from the challenges of daily life in the South. As Hurston found in her study of Southern work camps, the consumption of moonshine was widespread and the enormous amounts of alcohol available contributed to a culture of excessive drinking. It also contributed violence within romantic relationships. Although work camps and plantations became the site of largely male African-American enclaves, cultural identities cut across gender with migrant women participating in similar activities in similar leisure spaces.

In contrast to juke joints and honky-tonks, rum shops had Caribbean rather than U.S. Southern antecedents. There are other differences as well between these three alcohol-driven institutions. Anthropologist Peter J. Wilson tell us that,

historically, rum shops— like taverns, juke joints, and other spaces where alcohol is consumed— served as places for male socializing and refuge from women. Wilson insists rum shops were spaces where “men gather and women enter only in cases of emergency and at the risk of embarrassment to themselves.”<sup>18</sup> Similarly, they served as male sanctuaries where men sought a reprieve from the problems they encountered with women at home and on the job. What is most useful is understanding the role that juke joints have historically played in the construction of working-class courtship rituals among southern-born African Americans. In these places, migrants developed a common working-class identity rooted in a shared courtship language and musical as well as culinary experience.<sup>19</sup>

### Conclusion

Analyzing Hurston’s documentation on courtship rituals among working-class, black, migrant laborers provides interesting insights into culture, class, gender, and race as well as work camps and plantations in the South. By the 1920s and 1930s, these places had reputations as spaces with raggedy juke joints catering to quick-tempered and dangerous knife-wielding men and women. Here, as in other places around the world where migrant workers congregated, the migrant workforce exhibited the characteristics of “lowdown” cultural identity: These were men and women who turned to gambling, drinking, and sex as a coping device during hard times and as entertainment.<sup>20</sup> ■

### Endnotes

1. Zora Neale Hurston, *Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings* [online] (New York: Library of America, 1995), p. 575.
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# KOONTI: THE STARCH THAT BUILT FLORIDA

by Randy K. Schwartz

A starch made from the Florida arrowroot plant was the most important of the many food products that the Muskogee (Creek) and Seminole people introduced to European settlers and to free and enslaved Africans in southern Florida. Settlers in that part of the state during 1800-1900, their first century there, probably couldn't have survived without this plant, which was among their top two or three calorie sources. In addition, along with sugar cane and cotton it was one of the first three cash crops to thrive in Florida—earlier than citrus fruits or pineapples.

But what is Florida arrowroot? First, it's not to be confused with true arrowroot (plant genus *Maranta*), another tropical American plant that yields a famous starch. Florida arrowroot is in the genus *Zamia* and thrives in Caribbean-Pine forests or other high, dry land. Each plant grows only about two feet above ground, but most of its weight is in the tuberous stems ("roots") below ground. In Seminole the starch is called *coonti hateka* ("white bread"); as a result, the Florida settlers referred to the plant as coontie, coomptie, or koonti. Natives and settlers alike used the starch from its tubers, which outwardly resemble sweet potatoes, to make breads, cakes, and gruels. Among those engaged in the arduous work of clearing the dense Florida pinewoods to make way for farms and homesteads, the dietary staples were koonti starch and turtle meat.

The settlers would dig up the tubers with a mattock-like tool and soak them in water overnight to soften them. The soaked tubers were split lengthwise and then reduced to a pulp, either by pounding (in the native custom) or by use of a small hand-cranked mill. The pulp was washed in a straining-cloth or sieve in order to leach out a dangerous plant toxin and to separate the starch grains, which sink in water, from the rest of the pulp. The discarded, red-tinged pulp, if left to decay and ferment, made a foul-smelling but excellent fertilizer for fruit trees.

The moist cakes of yellowish-white starch could be dried and bleached in the sun, either on canvas sheets on the ground or on muslin racks. The result was a fine white powder which, unlike flour, could last indefinitely in Florida's moist climate. As they would later do with hominy grits, the settlers would always have a batch of this starch simmering in the gruel-pot or "sofkee-pot", a word and custom adopted from the native people (Muskogee *safki*).

By 1835, snow-white koonti had become a commercial product, selling for 8 cents per pound in northern markets. It served as a relatively pure, slightly sweet, general-purpose starch for cooking and baking, both on land and sea. Being low in fiber, it was also suitable for simple paps or puddings for children and the dyspeptic. To make a sweetened pudding, the starch was boiled with milk and flavored with sugar, cream, or other ingredients. Alternatively, unsweetened koonti pudding can be

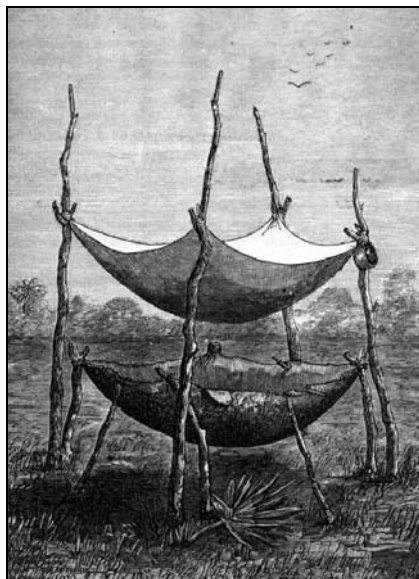


These disk-shaped flatbreads were made from koonti starch in the traditional Seminole manner.

Photo: <http://www.trailoffloridasindianheritage.org/>

sliced after it cools, and served with a sauce made with egg yolks, sugar, and butter.

Because the plant grows so slowly, it has to be foraged rather than cultivated. "Guess I will have to dig koonti" was a stock phrase among English-speaking settlers in South Florida in the 1800s: a family in need of cash would scour the thick-growth pinewoods to find the plants and dig up their tubers (20 cents per barrel), or spend about one week to turn the tubers into a 250-lb. barrel of dried koonti starch. The starch could be sold for 3-8 cents per pound to operators of schooners (sailing boats), which took the barrels south to Key West. From there the cargo was taken by steamship to ports such as Charleston, SC, and New Orleans, LA. Factories processed the starch into wafers, biscuits, crackers, cookies, candy, puddings, and other products. Some of the starch was used to make spaghetti, and some was even exported to Italy for this purpose.



An 1884 drawing of a Seminole koonti starch strainer.

Photo: State Archives of Florida via the Florida Memory website, image no. PR04767



Over time, the starch-making process became more mechanized, with horse-, mule-, or steam-powered koonti mills popping up here and there in the Florida pinewoods or in flat open fields. In the 1840s, George W. Ferguson's mill, located in what is now Miami, employed as many as 25 workers. By 1870, there were several commercial koonti mills operating in that area. The tuber-digging crews relied especially on the expertise of Afro-Bahamian workers (the same plant is indigenous to the Bahamas).

Northern bakers generally referred to the product as Florida Arrowroot Starch (to distinguish it from true arrowroot and its starch). *The Grocer's Encyclopedia* (1911) listed it as "Koonti or Indian Bread Root: a Florida plant whose roots give a meal or flour resembling arrowroot." A 1912 community cookbook from Miami, *The Florida Tropical Cook Book*, included many contributed recipes calling for koonti starch in sauces, gravies, puddings, pies, etc.

In the years around 1900, the koonti starch industry began to noticeably decline. This downturn was due to many factors. First, successive clearing of Florida land made the arrowroot plant harder to find. Corn, unlike Florida arrowroot, can actually be cultivated, which helps explain why more and more rural people, both Indian and non-Indian, used cornmeal grits rather than koonti in their sofkee-pots. Because the industry was so labor-intensive, its profit margin had always been modest. Residents complained of the stench surrounding the mills. Then a legal blow came in 1925, when the FDA ruled that koonti manufacturers could no longer label or promote their product with the name "arrowroot". In addition, the starch of true arrowroot, a rival, was easier to manufacture since that plant is cultivable. In 1926 the A. B. Hurst mill, located in the greater Miami area and the last of the commercial koonti-starch mills still being operated, was demolished by a hurricane. ■

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Charles Peacock's commercial koonti-starch mill in the pinewoods near Coconut Grove, FL, ca. 1890.

Photo by Ralph Middleton Munroe (1851-1933), held by the Historical Museum of Southern Florida, Miami; digital version accessed via State University Libraries of Florida (ID no. RTVM00010008).

## LOWDOWN CULTURE *continued from page 11*

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# MORE NOTES ON FLORIDA FOODWAYS

by Randy K. Schwartz

In addition to the books referred to elsewhere in this issue, a number of others are helpful for understanding early foodways of Florida. They also help us to better recognize the imprint that food traditions have left on the modern Florida culinary landscape, from indoor kitchens and restaurants to outdoor fish fries and festivals.

## Tropical Foods for a National Market

One such book is *The Grocer's Encyclopedia* (New York, 1911), designed as an information reference to assist large commercial grocers in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> The book's author, Artemas Ward, had gained experience in the Cuban export-import trade when he was a young man at the Philadelphia firm of Isaac Hough & Company in the 1870s. Looking through the book, we can see that there were several exotic foodstuffs indigenous to Florida that were already being marketed beyond state borders over a century ago.

In particular, there are listings for "Koonti or *Indian Bread Root*", "Palmetto, or *Cabbage Palm*", the papaw, the sea grape or shore grape, the green turtle, and the ormer. The first two are treated in other articles in this issue. The papaw, we learn from Ward, is related to the papaya but not to the North American paw-paw. He goes on to describe it:

The tropical Papaw, supplied to American markets chiefly from Florida and the West Indies, is about the size of a cantaloupe, elongated in shape and with a thick, greenish or dull-orange roughly corrugated skin. It is eaten raw with salt, being agreeable in flavor when at its best, and also cooked and pickled.

Sea grape is a plant in the buckwheat family that grows on sandy tropical beaches. The reddish berries, each with a big pit that accounts for most of the berry, grow in grape-like clusters and can be eaten as table fruits or made into jams and jellies.

For preparing turtle soup or turtle steaks in big-city restaurants and clubs, Ward wrote that the turtle of choice was a huge sea variety:

The Green Turtle leads all other varieties in the market, and is sold alive, dried and canned. ... The majority of those brought alive to the Eastern markets come from Florida, Cuba and the British West Indies, the large South American supply going chiefly to Europe. The Green Turtle has been known to grow to a weight of 700 pounds or larger, but these very big specimens are seldom handled commercially. The average market weight ranges from 50 to 300 pounds, those between the two extremes being generally preferred, being considered choicer in flesh as well as much easier to

handle. ... For shipment, the turtle's flippers are tied together and it is placed on its back. ... For land transportation in cold weather, the turtle is usually sewed into burlap bags lined with excelsior or dried seaweed, only the head being left out. It is also in some cases crated for further protection.

The ormer, a type of sea snail in the abalone family, was identified as "a shellfish found on the coast of Florida. The flavor may be described as between that of oysters and very delicate veal."

Ward also discussed several edible plants whose cultivation in Florida had been introduced from other regions, notably citrus fruits and mangoes from Asia, and from elsewhere in the Americas coconut palms, manioc (the source of tapioca starch), and guava. By this time, Florida's guava growers were unable to keep up with demand, and the processors had taken to importing much of their guava from its homelands further south, as Ward noted:

Guava jelly is usually marketed in screw-capped glasses or in neatly wrapped white wooden boxes. The product generally rated the highest is that made in Florida from Brazilian fruit—it is firm, of choice flavor and brilliant color.

Thirty years later, a Florida author sang the praises of guava jelly:

Most people dislike the smell of the ripe guavas, but nevertheless many old crackers prefer them to peaches. I doubt if there is a finer jelly fruit in all the world. Fresh fruit will often yield over three times its weight in jelly. I know a northern man who sends to Florida for guavas, not because they are better than apples, but because they produce so much more fine jelly than any other fruit.<sup>2</sup>



Filling guava jelly into jars at the Lone Palm Preserving Co. in Bradenton, FL, Jul. 1949.

Photo: State Archives of Florida via the Florida Memory website, image no. C011352



## Foodways as Folklore: The WPA

Well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, while marine turtles continued to be shipped northward as big-city restaurant fare, rural and small-town Floridians preserved their own customs of eating fried turtle steaks and ground-meat “turtleburgers”. Sometimes they used marine turtles, and other times a land turtle called the gopher tortoise. This last was simply called a “gopher” in Florida, where it had helped sustain generations of pinewoods pioneers in the previous century.

Such customs were recorded during the Great Depression by folklorists hired by the Federal Writers’ Project, including Stetson Kennedy, Rose Shepherd, and Zora Neale Hurston. Some of their work is collected in Mark Kurlansky’s recent WPA anthology.<sup>3</sup>

For example, among the topics recorded by Stetson Kennedy, a white man from Jacksonville, were seafood customs in the Keys that had been introduced there by Bahamian, Haitian, and other Caribbean immigrants. He wrote that the locals referred to Bahamians as Conchs (pronounced Conks), so important was conch in their diet. By this time just about everyone in the Keys was eating conch, and it was served in most area restaurants, often raw (dressed with a lime-juice vinaigrette) in sandwiches or salads, or else cooked in the form of “steaks” or in spicy conch chowders. Almost as important as conch was “grunt” or “croaker”, a bottom-feeding fish, often fried up and served with corn grits. Kennedy (1916-2011), a civil rights activist who famously infiltrated the KKK, would go on to author or co-author such books as *Palmetto Country* (1942), *South Florida Folklife* (1994), and *Grits and Grunts: Folkloric Key West* (2008).

Rose Shepherd reported on a St. Augustine church supper of rice “perlow” (pilau) prepared with shrimp, pork, and datil peppers. She included much detail, including a recipe. Kurlansky questions her attribution of perlow to early Minorcan settlers; he believes it more likely arrived from India by way of the West Indies.

Zora Neale Hurston, from the Black hamlet of Eatonville in central Florida, recorded the African-American myth, widespread in this region, of a paradise called “Diddy-Wah-Diddy”. In this magical land, food is free and plentiful and cooks itself: barbecued chickens run toward you with knives and forks stuck in their sides, while sweet-potato pies push and shove to get into the act, and no matter how much you eat, it immediately grows back. (For more on Hurston’s work, see Fred Opie’s article in this issue.)

The WPA writers wrote about hush puppies, “corn meal scalded in milk, mixed with egg, baking powder, and onion, and cooked in the grease of frying fish.” In Florida, where hush puppies are believed to have appeared first, more than a century ago, they were often called “wampus”. The writers refer to the Minorcan-heritage *fromajardis* as a “ring-shaped baked cheese cake” with a symbolic cross cut in the rim, a contrast to the now-standard *empanada*-like shape described by Pam Dishman in her article in this issue. Other foods noted by the writers include koonti starch; swamp salad and swamp cabbage, both made with palmetto buds; rattlesnake meat boiled and served with “supreme” sauce; and “rattlesnake snacks”, hors-d’œuvres made with salted, hickory-smoked thin slices of snake meat.



Making hush puppies at Oscar Johnson’s fish fry in Homosassa, on the Gulf Coast of Florida, 1947.

Photo: State Archives of Florida via the Florida Memory website, image no. C002119

## Mostly Mullet

As noted above, hush puppies are inextricably linked to fish fries. CHAA Co-President Joanne Nesbit, who visits Florida a lot, lent me her copy of George “Grif” Griffin’s *The Mostly Mullet Cookbook*. Among the other information, lore, and recipes, he observed that making these fritters takes an expertise comparable— and complementary— to that of fishing itself: “In Southern cooking, the hush puppy is an art form— like throwing a cast net.”<sup>4</sup>

Mullet have been plentiful on both coasts of Florida, and for centuries this oily fish has remained one of the most popular to feast upon there— no small thing in a state that boasts grouper, red snapper, pompano, and dozens of other types of fish. Solitary mullet fishermen use poles equipped with “snatch hooks”, or they hurl cast nets with a much-admired artistry. In commercial mullet fishing, a seine net might be hauled in by several men at once, but the largest such nets, along with gill nets, were banned by Florida in 1995.

While frying is the most common way to prepare mullet these days, Grif also included separate chapters for baking, broil-

*continued on next page*

# FLORIDA FOODWAYS *continued from page 15*



Mullet seining on the Gulf Coast in Saint Teresa, FL, ca. 1905.

Photo: State Archives of Florida via the Florida Memory website, image no. N030596

ing, grilling, smoking, and more. He raved about smoked mullet, a delicacy in Florida that is often flaked and made into spreads and dips that can even be purchased in supermarkets:

There is nothing in the world even similar to smoked mullet. ... Neither mahi-mahi nor salmon can touch the unique, nutty mullet taste, so clean and so buttery and distinctive. Smoked mackerel is *nearly* as good, and smoked pompano is not something to pass over. But I repeat: in the smoked department, *nothing touches mullet*. It's as good as it gets.

Grif's book didn't get into fish roe, and to most Floridians this is a "new" way to feast upon mullet. A preserved delicacy called *bottarga* can be made from the sac of eggs that is harvested

from a female Grey Striped Mullet. This sac or pouch, about 6-8 inches long and 1-2 inches wide, is sun-dried and salt-cured to produce a deep-golden slab that keeps well in the kitchen and can be sliced or scraped onto food. It is delicious scraped over fresh salads, grilled vegetables, or pasta dishes, used in place of anchovies in a Caesar salad dressing, or simply eaten on *crostini*. The eggs are also sold in expensive little jars, similar to beluga caviar except that the contents are bright yellow.

John T. Edge, director of the Southern Foodways Alliance, championed a family *bottarga* operation in Florida as a vivid example of the dynamism of Southern food culture. The Anna Maria Fish Co. is located in Cortez on Sarasota Bay, the oldest continuous fishing village in the state (1880s). Artisan *bottarga* producer Seth T. Cripe, his brother Mic, and their mother, Nancy L. Cripe, teamed up with business partner Ed Chiles, son of former Governor Lawton Chiles, Jr., to found the company in 2007. For decades, Edge wrote, most mullet roe from the area has been frozen and shipped to places like Taiwan, Egypt, and Italy by local wholesalers such as the A. P. Bell Fish Co., which has been in business since the 1940s. But he noted that the export of preserved mullet from Florida goes back a longer way:

Many seemingly newfangled ideas leverage long traditions. According to exhibits on display at the Florida Maritime Museum in Cortez, itinerant Spanish fishermen here in the late 1700s were harvesting mullet roe, which they cured in a brine solution, preserved in lean-to smoke huts and shipped to Cuba and beyond.<sup>5</sup>

Seth Cripe, who was born in Cortez, looks back even further:

This area was founded on fishing for mullet and there are Spanish writings from the explorers in the 1500s that speak of the area natives drying fish and golden mullet roe sacs out in the sun. Striped Grey Mullet and its roe are such a deep part of our history and environment....<sup>6</sup>



This 1938 photo is from the ninth annual Fish Broil and Mullet Festival, a public-schools fundraiser held in the City Park of St. Pete Beach. The annual festival continues today, and the fish are still grilled on bedsprings placed over open fire pits.

Photo:  
Gulf Beaches Historical  
Museum, St. Pete  
Beach, FL.



## Restaurants and Food Festivals

The restaurant scene in Florida has included many historic and colorful places over the years. To mention a few:

- Florida's oldest surviving eatery, the Columbia Restaurant, was founded in 1905 by Cuban immigrant Casimiro Hernandez, Sr., in Ybor City near Tampa. Originally a small 60-seat corner café frequented by local cigar-factory workers, it was known for its Cuban coffee and authentic Cuban sandwiches. Now in its fourth generation of family ownership, it is the largest Spanish restaurant in the world. Live flamenco and other entertainment is offered in the elegant dining rooms. A signature item on the huge menu is the 1905 Salad, with iceberg lettuce, julienned baked ham, Swiss cheese, tomato, olives, grated Romano cheese, and a garlic dressing traditionally used by Cubans to marinate fresh roast pork.
- Joe's Stone Crab Inn at the south end of Miami Beach, founded in 1913 and still run by the Weiss family, was the first restaurant in the world to serve stone crabs (1921). Dan Parker, a connoisseur, claimed in 1951 that stone crabs are three times as delicious as lobsters! Joe's sells an average of more than 1,000 lbs. of them per night. This type of crab regenerates a claw that's removed carefully, so the crab can be "harvested" repeatedly over a number of years. Nicolaas Mink recounts the fascinating story of this discovery by a Harvard scientist, and how it led Joseph Weiss—a Hungarian Jewish immigrant who'd abandoned New York for health reasons—from rags to riches.<sup>7</sup>
- At the big, pink Chalet Suzanne restaurant and inn, run since 1931 by the Hinshaw family at Lake Wales in central Florida, waitresses in Swiss costumes served rich, sherry-spiked lobster Newberg, thick lamb chops, and a famous starter invented by founder Bertha Hinshaw: grapefruit halves broiled with butter, sugar, and cinnamon, and garnished with sautéed chicken livers. Sadly, the place closed last August.
- Jumbo's, a soul-food diner run by the Flams, a Jewish family, was the first white-owned restaurant in the Liberty City section of Miami to hire and serve Black people (1967). Sadly, it closed last July.
- Yoder's, established in 1975, is a homestyle Amish restaurant in Pinecraft, an Amish-Mennonite neighborhood in Sarasota. It's famous for its 34 varieties of pie baked fresh daily, such as peach, raisin, coconut cream, and peanut butter cream.
- The Marsh Landing in Fellsmere, a sugarcane town in south Florida, is famous for fried frog legs and doubles as a sort of frog-leg museum. The building was formerly the headquarters of the Florida Crystal Sugar Company. The restaurant also serves catfish, alligator tail, fried green tomato BLT sandwiches, swamp cabbage, pickled okra, and vinegar hot peppers.
- The Florida Cookery restaurant, established in 2012 inside the James Royal Palm Hotel in Miami Beach, is named after *Florida Cookery*, a 1940s Junior League community cookbook. When the chef-owner, Kris Wessel, first ran across the book in his grandmother's kitchen, he noticed that it included dishes from Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Cuba, Haiti, and Brazil. His menu incorporates all of these influences.



Stone crab claws at the Columbia Restaurant in Ybor City, 1950s.

Photo by Karl E. Holland (1919-1993), held by the State Archives of Florida; accessed via the Florida Memory website, image no. C28442

Given Florida's climate, the state can host outdoor food festivals 12 months of the year. A few of the most notable ones:

- Fellsmere Frog Leg Festival, January in Fellsmere
- Kumquat Festival, January in Dade City
- Swamp Cabbage Festival, February in LaBelle (see Patty Brant's article in this issue)
- Florida Strawberry Festival, March in Plant City
- Blue Crab Festival, May in Panacea
- International Mango Festival, July in Coral Gables
- Datil Pepper Festival, October in St. Augustine
- Central Florida Peanut Festival, October in Williston
- Boggy Bayou Mullet Festival, October in Niceville
- Fish Broil and Mullet Festival, November in St. Pete Beach
- Florida Seafood Festival, November in Apalachicola, including the National Oyster Shucking Championship. ■

## Endnotes

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3. Mark Kurlansky, *The Food of a Younger Land* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2009), pp. 123-125, 142-143, 170-174, 176-178, 183.
4. George Griffin, *The Mostly Mullet Cookbook: A Culinary Celebration of the South's Favorite Fish (and Other Great Southern Seafood)* (Sarasota, FL: Pineapple Press, 1998), p. 29.
5. John T. Edge, "An Export Stays Home", *New York Times*, Jul. 24, 2013.
6. As quoted by Ed Lallo, "Bottarga—Poor Man's Caviar Reaps Rich Benefits for Gulf Fishermen", *Gulf Seafood News*, Apr. 6, 2015.
7. Nicolaas Mink, "Selling the Storied Stone Crab: Eating, Ecology, and the Creation of South Florida Culture", *Gastronomica*, 6:4 (Fall 2006), pp. 32-43.

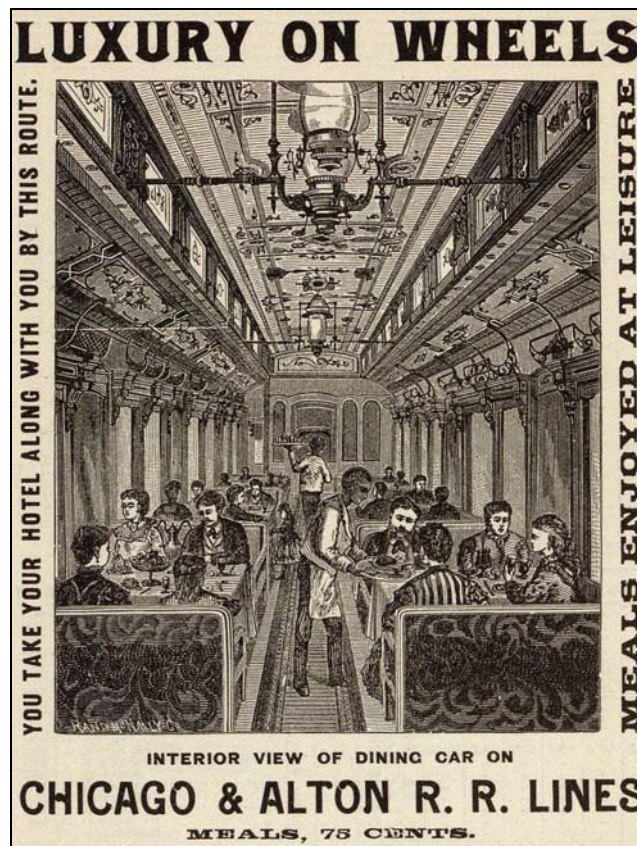
# EATING IN UNUSUAL PLACES

Exporail, the Canadian Railway Museum, has published a 200-page cookbook, *100 Years of Canadian Railway Recipes* (Saint-Constant, Québec: Exporail Canada, 2014), in French and English editions. Marie-Paule Partikian and Jean-Paul Viaud have compiled 90 recipes from Canadian National, Canadian Pacific, and VIA Rail Canada. Examples of main dishes are Halibut à la Scotia, Roast chicken breast with cranberry-orange maple butter, Rack of lamb with blueberry balsamic demi-glace, and Sweetbread Newburg à la Vignal. The work also features historical information on life aboard dining cars and in the kitchens, anecdotes from workers, and archival photographs of artifacts.

For those pursuing an American track, there's a new book by Jeri Quinzio (Culinary Historians of Boston), *Food on the Rails: The Golden Era of Railroad Dining* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), part of the "Food on the Go" Series from that publisher. *Repast* has previously mentioned Quinzio's histories of pudding and ice cream. Her railroad history runs from the 1870s, when passengers had to bring their own food aboard, to the relative luxury of Pullman cars, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Limited, the Blue Train, and the Orient Express, where the quality often equaled that of the finest restaurants. Coverage includes not only foods and menus but also the dining accommodations and service on board, as well as in railway station restaurants. Quinzio chronicles the steep decline after World War 2, when freeways and airlines became preferred routes of travel, and railroads turned to frozen foods, self-service, and quick meals and snacks.

Two additional entries in Rowman & Littlefield's "Food on the Go" Series:

- Simon Spalding, *Food at Sea: Shipboard Cuisine from Ancient to Modern Times* (2014) traces the preservation, preparation, and consumption of food at sea, over a period of several thousand years and in a variety of cultures, in cargo ships, passenger ships, warships, and other vessels. The book shows how seafarers' raw materials, cooking and eating equipment, and methods of preparation have reflected the shoreside practices of their cultures while also differing from them. The economies of whole countries have developed around foods that could survive long trips at sea.
- Richard Foss (Culinary Historians of Southern California), *Food in the Air and Space: The Surprising History of Food and Drink in the Skies* (2014) covers meals aboard balloons and zeppelins; airplanes, helicopters, and flying boats; intercontinental jets; and spacecraft. Readers learn how familiar foods were used to help lure commercial travelers to try flying, and how chefs, engineers, and flight crews solved problems involved in preparing and serving meals in the skies. The book also explores the cross-influence of air- and land-based cuisines, such as consumers' reception of foods originally designed for spaceflight. Previously *Repast* has mentioned a history of rum written by Foss, who started out as a restaurant reviewer in Los Angeles.



In America, street-food traditions have been moribund, at least before the current food-truck craze. But on our planet as a whole, where over half of the population now lives in urban areas, these deeply-rooted traditions still thrive. Two Chicago writers, Bruce Kraig (Culinary Historians of Chicago) and Colleen Taylor Sen, teamed up to edit *Street Food Around the World: An Encyclopedia of Food and Culture* (ABC-CLIO, 2013), which won a Gourmand World Cookbook Award. This is actually an encyclopedia that surveys common street foods in about 100 countries and regions, depicting how "fast foods of the common people" fit into a region's environments, cultural history, and economy. Street foods also show the movements of peoples and their foods across the globe; e.g., the dumplings *mandoo*, *manti*, *momo*, and *baozi* originated in Central Asia and spread along the Silk Roads during the Middle Ages. The entries provide engaging information about specific foods as well as coverage of vendor and food stall culture and issues. Drs. Kraig and Sen, respectively, were the authors of two volumes from Reaktion Books in 2009, *Hot Dog: A Global History* and *Curry: A Global History*, and Dr. Kraig spoke to CHAA in June 2013.

Walter Levy (Culinary Historians of New York), *The Picnic: A History* (AltaMira Press, 2013), is part of that publisher's The Meals Series. We think of the picnic as an outdoor meal set on a blanket, but historically picnics came in many forms, even indoors, and at any time of the day. Drawing on literature, art, and music, Levy, an emeritus professor of English at Pace University, addresses questions such as who arranges picnics, and what is their gastronomic appeal? His book begins with a history of the picnic and of the word itself, followed by chapters on classic picnic fare here and abroad, indoor picnics, outdoor picnics, and picnics in the arts and popular media. The other titles already published in this series are *Breakfast*, *Lunch*, *Brunch*, and *Barbecue*. ■



# MORSELS & TIDBITS

We continue to make note of publications and presentations by CHAA members during the past year:

- **Robin Watson** wrote an article, “James and the Giant Cheese”, in the magazine *Culture: The Word on Cheese* (Spring 2014). The piece described a huge wheel of aged cheese, nearly seven feet in diameter and weighing over 7000 lbs., that was produced in Ingersoll, ONT, in 1866 for promotional purposes. Robin also included a poem about the cheese, written at the time by local undertaker and furniture maker James McIntyre. More recently, the Spring 2015 issue of the magazine includes some writing by Zingerman’s Deli co-founder and cheese expert **Ari Weinzwieg**, who recounts how he embarked on his unanticipated career in the food industry.
- On March 23, our Co-President **Judy Steeh** gave an illustrated talk, “Postwar American Cooking”, to the Americana Interest Group of the Ann Arbor chapter of AAUW. She spoke about popular conveniences such as cake mixes, TV dinners, Jell-O, microwave ovens, and Weber grills; the impact of feminism; cooks such as Irma Rombauer, James Beard, Julia Child, and Alice Waters; the rising tide of immigration and ethnic foods; the surge in vegetarian, organic, and locavore eating; and the “celebrity chef” phenomenon.
- In late March, founder **Jan Longone** reprised her illustrated talk “American Foodways: The Jewish Contribution” at the Jewish Community Center of Metro Detroit, in West Bloomfield (see *Repast*, Winter 2014). Jan is Adjunct Curator at the Janice Bluestein Longone Culinary Archive, Special Collections, Univ. of Michigan Libraries.
- **Mary Bilyeu** wrote an article about the Dinnerware Museum in the *Toledo Blade* (May 18), where she is Food Editor. The article, “Ann Arbor Museum Celebrates All Things Plates, Functional or Not”, conveyed the passion for the subject that is imparted by museum director and fellow CHAA member **Margaret Carney**. Mary described several museum pieces in some detail, including a large 19<sup>th</sup>-Century ceramic English game-pie dish from Wedgwood, and a vividly-colored 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Longwy Ware enameled ceramic plate from France.

Several friends of CHAA have published notable books about food history recently:

- **Andrew F. Smith** of New York, who has given several talks for us over the years and written several articles in *Repast*, is the author of *Sugar: A Global History* (Reaktion Books, 2015), part of the Edible Series for which he is General Editor. This is a concise historical survey of sugar production in both hemispheres; the various uses of sugar, with special emphasis on the U.S. and the western world; and health concerns regarding sugar consumption.
- Prof. **Darra Goldstein** (Williams College) was Editor-in-chief of *The Oxford Companion to Sugar and Sweets* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2015). This 920-page work is encyclopedic in format and coverage, with entries on just about every conceivable topic related to the title subject. I turned to a random page and read consecutive entries for *lauzinaj* (by Nawal Nasrallah), *layer cake* (Patricia Bixler Reber), *lead*,

*sugar of* (Michelle M. Francel), and *leaf, gold and silver* (Joe Roberts). Prof. Goldstein spoke about table settings in the Gilded Age at the May 2005 Symposium on American Culinary History in Ann Arbor, and this past Feb. 19 she spoke about the visual and aesthetic character of cookbooks over seven centuries at the Toledo Museum of Art.

- Prof. **David S. Shields** (Univ. of South Carolina) has written *Southern Provisions: The Creation and Revival of a Cuisine* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 2015). The book shows that what we think of today as Southern food tastes little like the original, because the heritage ingredients have largely disappeared and are only now in the process of being recovered. The book includes a revised, expanded version of Prof. Shields’s article, “Of Strife and Sweetness: The Civil War and the Rise of Sorghum” from *Repast*, Summer 2011.
- Prof. **Marcie Cohen Ferris** (Univ. of North Carolina-Chapel Hill) has a new book, *The Edible South: The Power of Food and the Making of an American Region* (Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2014). It chronicles the evolution of Southern cuisine as an integral part of the region’s culture, from plantation days to the Civil War and Reconstruction, reformers from the domestic science movement and the USDA, the civil rights movement, the rise of the New South, and the counterculture. Prof. Ferris spoke about the book on Mar. 10 at Zingerman’s Roadhouse here in Ann Arbor, and she spoke about Jewish culinary traditions in the South at the May 2007 Symposium on American Culinary History in Ann Arbor.
- History professor **Angela Jill Cooley** (Minnesota State Univ.-Mankato) has published her first book, *To Live and Dine in Dixie: The Evolution of Urban Food Culture in the Jim Crow South* (Univ. of Georgia Press, 2015). The work, an adaptation of her 2011 Ph.D. dissertation at the Univ. of Alabama, centers on segregated public eating places as loci of tension and struggle in the Jim Crow South, roughly 1900-1970. One of the notable features of the book is the initial chapter, “Scientific Cooking and Southern Whiteness”, which exposes racial underpinnings of the domestic science reformers and “pure food” movement of the Progressive Era. Prof. Cooley was the author of “Feeding the Movement: Paschal’s Restaurant and Self-Reliance in the African-American Community”, *Repast* (Winter 2010).

We mourn the passing of two renowned food scholars:

- **John Egerton** (Jun. 14, 1935 – Nov. 21, 2014), of Nashville, TN, was a co-founder of the Southern Foodways Alliance. Among his books is *Southern Food: At Home, on the Road, in History* (1987), which surveys contemporary Southern eating and also argues that food can become an avenue toward racial reconciliation.
- **Gil Marks** (May 30, 1952 – Dec. 5, 2014) was a historian of Jewish food worldwide. Born in Charleston, WV, as a boy he complained of his mother’s cooking and so began teaching himself to cook. He was ordained as a rabbi in New York, and lived there most of his adult life. Among his books is the *Encyclopedia of Jewish Food* (2010), which digs up the history and culture of hundreds of edibles, from *adafina* to *za’atar*. ■

# CHAA CALENDAR

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Sunday, Jul. 19, 2015

4:00 – 7:00 p.m., Ladies' Literary Club  
(218 N. Washington Street, Ypsilanti, MI),  
Members-Only Participatory Theme Meal,  
"Under the Southern Cross:  
Foods from Countries on the Equator or Below"

**On the Back Burner:** We welcome ideas and submissions from all readers of *Repast*, including for the following planned future theme-issues. Suggestions for future themes are also welcome.

- Fall 2015: Restaurants and Menus
- Winter 2016: Reminiscences of Food Professionals.

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