



“Oysters are good. You can’t eat lunch in a more natural way than squatting on an oyster bar until you get through.” – Robb White, *How to Build a Tin Canoe*

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NEWS FROM THE SOUTHERN FOODWAYS ALLIANCE

Channeling Eugene: Chef Linton Hopkins as Medium

by Angie Mosier

Every night around 10 p.m., chef Linton Hopkins of Restaurant Eugene in Atlanta, Georgia, makes the rounds through his small, elegant dining room. He enjoys connecting with patrons and is most likely accustomed to the occasional zealous diner, fueled by good wine and food, gushing appropriately and shaking hands. On one particular night, however, there was a table that seemed different; one of the diners went to the bar, ordered half a dozen bottles of cold beer, and promptly elbowed his way through to the small kitchen to pass them out to the chefs, line cooks, and dish washers. Another shook Linton’s hand and gave him the charge, “You should create a meal dedicated to Eugene Walter—‘Eugene on Eugene.’” Linton had never heard of Southern writer and bon vivant Eugene Walter, but to have something so abstract thrown at him by an appreciative eater was enough to set him into action.

It seems that Walter, a novelist, actor, translator, poet, entertainer, and great home cook, did not have much in common with Eugene Holeman, Linton’s grandfather for whom the restaurant is named, but they do share the name and a great appreciation for Southern food and humor. Linton is a native Atlantan who spent summers in Memphis with his grandparents, Elizabeth and Eugene Holeman. “Elizabeth taught me behavior those summers. If my elbows were on the table, I would get a swift kick to the shin under the table. My grandfather, Eugene, was a smart man, a chemist, and for many years was president of the FDA in Tennessee. He was fun, loved humor and gardening and food. We always enjoyed Sunday dinner growing up. The family was the table and that was deep. We always celebrate with food.” That depth of communion led Linton to attend the Culinary Institute of America, and after years of honing his craft in kitchens in New Orleans and Washington, D.C., Linton and his wife, Gina, moved back to his hometown, Atlanta, to open their own restaurant—Restaurant Eugene.

Eugene Walter (1921–1998) grew up in Mobile, Alabama, lived in Paris and Rome for much of the 1950s, ‘60s, and ‘70s, then moved back to Mobile in 1979. He seemed to know everyone in the literary, artistic, and entertainment worlds, and feasted on collard greens, spoon bread, and grits at his Roman table. Numerous prizes were bestowed upon Walter for his short stories, poetry, and novels. He dabbled in songwriting and became an actor by accident; his character was so large that directors could not resist him. He appears in a score of films, most notably in Federico Fellini’s *8 1/2* (1963). His food writing was another happy accident, beginning with a letter to a friend describing a wonderful New York restaurant. That letter ended up being published in the *Herald-Tribune*. Walter’s food writing career flourished as a result of his beautiful language and his attention to the people and places behind the food—the soul of the food. It is through the love of the “depth of the table” that Linton feels the bond of the two Eugenes, and that is what drives him to create his Tribute to an Untidy Pilgrim, the Viking Range lunch on Saturday of the symposium.

Incidentally, that night at Restaurant Eugene—the night when Linton found out about Eugene Walter—was also the night that Linton was introduced to the SFA. That table, in the center of his restaurant, was filled with enthusiastic members. Linton has now done enough research on Walter to pen his own biography of the man, but he would rather bring him to us via the plate. “I was given the gift of a person, and that knowledge makes me better. Restaurant Eugene is not Restaurant Linton Hopkins; I have to know the person I am honoring and the people I am cooking for. Bringing the ‘Eugenes’ to the table is about channeling memories, humor, and respect.” Find out more about Restaurant Eugene at www.restauranteugene.com.

SAVE THE DATE

The New Orleans Table; Return and Recollect, in concert with Tabasco in San Francisco, California. November 29

Secret Foods of the South Dinner at Zingerman's Roadhouse, Ann Arbor, Michigan. December 5

SFA Films Happy Hour and Documentary Dinner at Woodfire Grill, Atlanta, Georgia. January 5-6

Taste of the South, showcasing the region's best chefs and artisans, Blackberry Farm, Walland, Tennessee. February 22-24

Camp Shoals, Alabama
April 20-21

Charleston, South Carolina Field Trip
June 22-24

Sweetness on the State Line: A Chronicle of Candy-Making in Bristol, Virginia

will be a featured exhibition at East Tennessee State University's B. Carroll Reece Museum in Johnson City, October 9, 2006, through January 31, 2007. The exhibition is an outgrowth of a class project in the University's "Foodways of Appalachia" course, by Lisa Elliott of Kingsport, a student in the master of arts in liberal studies program. It documents the history of candy companies in Bristol dating to 1909 and is part of Bristol's sesquicentennial celebration. An opening reception will be held Thursday, October 12, from 5 to 7 p.m. at the museum.

— Henry Mencken

⇒ GRAVY ⇐

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Impressions from Camp Nashville

SFA Day Camps are locally-driven events geared toward culinary tourists. Camp Nashville—which included a wonderful side trip to Lynchburg, home of Jack Daniel's—inspired this reverie.

The sting of a lime popsicle from Las Paletas, and the salve of a second one, in plum. An echo of Bill Monroe's mandolin at The Station Inn. Hap Townes's recollections of stewed raisins. E. W. Mayo hoisting the Tabasco Guardian of the Tradition Award high above his wheelchair while sweet potatoes ooze from his fried pies. Mahalia Jackson's music. Mennonite-made tomato cocktail, with a whispered suggestion of Bloody Marys. Quartered Cherokee Purples. Ronda and Jonda jarring The Lipstick Lounge. The symbiosis of Allan Benton's bacon and a plank of Sean Brock's fried catfish. Sideshow Benny slapping his jaws when he makes Tomato King. Tales of Phila Hach feeding the United Nations General Assembly beaten biscuits on the grounds of Nashville's Parthenon. A painted pig for Jim 'N Nick's. Pink Ping Pong tomatoes at The Turnip Truck. Dill pickle counterpoint to hot chicken melody and cayenne-stained light bread as coda. Guardian Award winner André Prince Jeffries telling filmmaker Joe York about a customer who eats Prince's hot chicken in a bathtub of cold water. Guardian Award winner David Swett Jr. describing his "restaurant without recipes." Habanero-spiced sausage and Yazoo brew among bricks at Marathon Motor Works. White beans green beans roast beef meatloaf macaroni fried green tomatoes banana pudding chocolate pie: Arnold's. Praise for Mary Beth. Camp Nashville 2006.

—Fred Sauceman

Letter from the President

It is with excitement and sincere gratitude that I share the good news of the most recent support of the Southern Foodways Alliance by the University of Mississippi. Through the office of Provost Carolyn Ellis Staton, we have received another \$30,000 grant for this fiscal year—and a commitment to establish a permanent University-funded budget line item thereafter to pay for our oral historian position.

Since its beginnings, SFA has enjoyed the hospitality and graciousness of the University. At my first symposium, before the word really got out about our organization, we could fit inside Barnard Observatory. Today, our membership of culinarians, writers, chefs, social historians, journalists, and eaters spans the country and enables many individuals and sponsors to learn about another well-kept secret—Oxford, Mississippi.

This commitment from the University is an acknowledgement of the importance of our mission of documenting and celebrating the diversity of the South through foodways. Our oral history program has already captured many individuals, traditions, regional identities, and food tales that would have otherwise been lost. Amy Evans, who has headed up this effort, has done an amazing job, and our collection of oral histories, perhaps more than anything else, sums up what SFA is about.

With the five-year plan the SFA board completed (led by the invaluable assistance of Chris Cavanaugh), this generous commitment by the University affirms our ongoing work as an organization. On behalf of all of us in the Southern Foodways Alliance, I would like to applaud Provost Staton, Vice Chancellor Gloria Kellum, and Chancellor Khayat. And I'd like to invite them all to join us in the Grove this October for a taste of the Gulf Coast, our focus for this fall's symposium.

Thanks for pulling up a seat and digging in.

Yours around the table,
Elizabeth Sims

The Gulf South by the Book: New Writing by 2006 Symposium Participants

by Thomas Head

Florida figures large in any consideration of the food of the Gulf South. Gary Mormino's book, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida* (University Press of Florida, 2005, \$24.95), is not specifically about Florida foodways, but food figures large in the social history of a state that produces "more oranges, tomatoes, sugarcane, grapefruit, ferns, green peppers, sweet corn, gladiolas, cucumbers, watermelons, tangerines snap beans, radishes, limes, and tangelos than any other state in the union." According to Mormino, "Indian River oranges and Ruskin tomatoes, as much as the beach and postcard, helped shape Florida's image as a winter paradise and bountiful dream state." The pressures of development and urbanization, however, are taking their toll on Florida agriculture, particularly on the family farm, and the future of that agricultural supremacy is, at the beginning of the 21st century, "cloudy."

Diane Roberts's *Dream State* (Free Press, 2004, \$25) is a rollicking tale of "eight generations of swamp lawyers, conquistadors, confederate daughters, banana republicans, and other wild life," many of them her relatives, who settled on the rich soil of the plantation country of northern Florida. These early planters lived life in a literary dream, trying to recreate the life of the landed gentry: "One minute they're hacking down a gum and scrub oak jungle, eating boiled possum . . . , the next they're ordering chandeliers and champagne from Philadelphia, eating green turtle soup at a restaurant with a genuine New Orleans Frenchman for a chef, and dressing up as Mary Queen of Scots or Harry Hotspur at a costume ball." This rich cast of characters runs from Achille Murat, who ruined several dinner parties trying to create a good recipe for buzzard, to the abstemious women of Wakulla County, who would refuse to cook a bear their husbands had shot if there was a chance the bear had been drunk from raiding a moonshine still. Roberts's astuteness as a political reporter and social observer is equally impressive no matter whether she is dealing with the early Spanish settlers or the election dispute of 2000. This is history that could have been written by Carl Hiassen.

Jim Shirley, chef at the Fish House in Pensacola, will discuss Pensacola's native Gazpachi Salad at the symposium. The recipe, derived from Spanish and Italian sailors who dipped their sea biscuits into gazpacho soup to soften them, is contained in Shirley's book *Good Grits: Southern Boy Cooks* (Pediment

Publishing, 2005, \$29.95). Shirley's cooking is firmly rooted in the South but influenced by his travel as a Navy pilot. Those who have eaten at the Fish House will be particularly happy to have his recipe for his signature Grits a Ya Ya, grits flavored with smoked Gouda and topped with a savory mixture of bacon, shrimp, mushrooms, and scallions.

Fred Thompson's new book, *The Big Book of Fish & Shellfish* (Chronicle Books, 2006, \$19.95) doesn't confine itself to the South, but how could any book by the author of *Iced Tea* not have a Southern slant? Fried Catfish, Barbecued Shrimp on Biscuits, Soft-Shell Crab Sandwiches, Brown Oyster Stew with Benne Seeds, Crayfish Etouffée, Seafood Country Captain—there's a wonderful mix of classics and less well known, but still traditional Southern seafood dishes. Thompson and Martha Foose will discuss "How Pompano Came to the Land of Cotton and Catfish" at the Delta Divertissement.

If the best titles are those that let you know exactly what you're getting, the best titles of 2006 are certainly the movie *Snakes on a Plane* and Robert St. John's book *Deep South Parties: How to Survive the Southern Cocktail Hour without a Box of French Onion Soup Mix, a Block of Processed Cheese, or a Cocktail Weenie* (Hyperion, 2006, \$19.95). St. John's recipes are usefully divided into items to be passed, dishes for the buffet table, hot dips, cold dips, and things that can be pulled out of the freezer for unexpected guests. You'll find classics like pimiento cheese, cheese straws, and shrimp dip, along with new ideas like pimiento cheese biscuits with Virginia ham and a black-eyed pea hummus. There's also a choice between Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Catholic, or Episcopalian punch. Robert St. John's presentation at the symposium is called "West Indies Salad: Bill Bayley Comes Home."

Robb Walsh's latest project is a book called *Sex, Death, and Oysters*, due in the fall of 2008. The book is based on an essay, nominated for a James Beard Journalism award, that may be found on the Web at <http://www.houstonpress.com/issues/2004-03-25/news/feature.html>. Like Walsh's earlier book, *Are You Really Going to Eat That?: Reflections of a Culinary Thrill Seeker* (Counterpoint Press, 2003, \$25), *Sex, Death, and Oysters* will look at Galveston Bay's oyster beds by exploring the cultures and personalities behind them. Walsh will talk about Galveston Bay oysters at the symposium and also moderate a panel called "Queer Gulf Coast Foods."

Delectable Dishes and Dainty Gluttons: Eugene Walter's Cookbooks

by Thomas Head

On Saturday morning at the 2006 SFA symposium, Don Goodman, executor of Eugene Walter's estate, will moderate a panel discussion, "At Table with Eugene Walter." Members of the panel will be Michael Batterberry, founding editor with his wife, Ariane, of *Food Arts*, who knew Eugene Walter in Rome, and Jack Pendarvis, a native of Bayou La Batre, Alabama, a friend of Walter's in his early days in Alabama.

Eugene Walter wrote only three books that are primarily cookbooks, but observations about the food and cooking of his

native South, particularly Mobile, where he grew up, also run through his novel *The Untidy Pilgrim* and his as-told-to-Katherine-Clark reminiscence *Milking the Moon: A Southerner's Story of Life on This Planet*.

The best known of his cookbooks is *American Cooking: Southern Style* in the Time-Life Foods of the World series. Widely thought to be among the best of the series, it is, unfortunately, no longer in print but is fairly frequently available from used book stores and search services. *Delectable Dishes*

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'Delectable Dishes' from the previous page

from *Termite Hall: Rare and Unusual Recipes* (1982) is available from The Bookshop, 262 Sutherland Bluff Drive, Eulonia, GA 31331 (telephone 912-832-6352) for \$18.50 plus \$3.50 for shipping. (Owner Virginia Hobson Hicks, a childhood friend of Eugene Walter, has offered SFA members who order the book directly from the store a 25 percent discount.) *Hints and Pinches: A Concise Compendium of Herbs and Aromatics with Illustrative Recipes and Asides on Relishes, Chutneys, and Other Such Concerns* (1991) is available in a new edition (\$5.99 at www.bn.com), with a forward by John T Edge. The book is as eccentric as Eugene Walter himself, a compendium of folklore, cooking hints, and recipes, organized alphabetically from Achioté, which Eugene uses in his red rice recipe, to Yellow Jessamine, a deadly poison.

Eugene Walter frequently makes the point in his writings about cooking that the Mobile he grew up in was a port city and its cooking was influenced by France, Spain, England, Africa, the Caribbean, and Native Americans. He learned about good food at an early age from his grandfather, who owned an import/export produce business, and his grandmother, a fine cook. His own awareness of these disparate influences that formed the Mobile cooking of his youth was increased by his years in Paris and Rome, where he ate fried chicken and turnip greens with Leontyne Price and served mint juleps to Judy Garland.

The book that best encapsulates Eugene Walter's attitude towards food is *Delectable Dishes from Termite Hall*. It shows his deep Southern roots, his whimsy, his knowledge of French and Italian cooking. Here, from *Delectable Dishes* by permission of Donald Goodman, is Eugene Walter's recipe for Pot Likker.

POT LIKKER

Take a day off and wash wash wash 3 or 4 big bunches of fresh (yes, I said fresh) turnip greens, younger the better. Then sit down and pluck the leaves from the stems, discarding any discolored or wounded bits. This takes time. Sit down, put on some Mozart. In your big heavy pot put a nut of unsalted butter over low heat, then put in 2 strips lean bacon, finely chopped, 1 unpeeled garlic toe, 1 or 2 chopped onions, 1 or 2 or 3 dried hot red little devil peppers, 1 bay leaf, 1/2 tsp. grated lemon peel, any old ham scraps or bones. When bacon and onions are about cooked, put in the greens, torn, not cut, into bits. Simmer simmer for about 1 hour over low heat. Stir once in awhile. When it looks and tastes right, strain the greens through a colander. Remove any unsightly bones and the garlic clove, then save the mound of greens to serve with pork sausage and corn bread. Strain the broth through a cloth and put aside to serve in the evening. Taste Pot Likker for flavorings, adjust. I usually put a sprinkle of finely-chopped celery heart leaves as a garnish. Serve hot hot hot. The meal might start with the Likker. Then the greens, chopped and turned out from a ring mould, surrounded with sausage and centered with hard-boiled eggs halved and daubed with Creole or Dijon mustard, might be the main dish.

The University of Mississippi

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