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FROM THE SOUTHERN FOODWAYS ALLIANCE

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ABOUT GRAVY

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Editor:
Sara Camp Arnold
gravy.sfa@gmail.com

Designer:
Devin Cox
www.devincox.net

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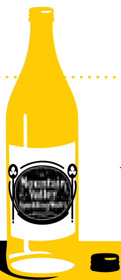

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EDWARD LEE'S KENTUCKY BENTO BOX

BRAISED COLLARDS AND KIMCHI WITH COUNTRY HAM AND CORNNUTS — BELLE CHEVRE ASH CHEESECAKE W/ TOGRASHI CARAMEL. EDAMAME AND BOILED PEANUT SALAD WITH TAHINI DRESSING AND PUFFED SORGHUM SEED. PULLED KENTUCKY BISON BRISKET WITH RED ONION-CILANTRO RELISH. — CHEDDAR/LARDO CORNBREAD.

How to Build a Kentucky Bento Box • Illustration by Phil Blank

THE ART OF THE MEAT-AND-THREE

SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL TO LOOK AT • SOMETHING NOURISHING TO EAT

by Jennifer Justus

CHET ATKINS HAD A FAVORITE TABLE at Hap Townes Restaurant, the legendary meat-and-three tucked just a few homeruns away from the Nashville Sounds' baseball stadium. He liked the first seat to the left, by the door. So when the restaurant's owner, James B. "Hap" Townes, commissioned a portrait of Atkins, he knew just the spot to hang it.

"I kept that one in the restaurant all the time," Townes recalled.

A lanky man with a deep, gentle voice, Townes hasn't served a plate lunch in more than two decades. When, twenty-six years ago, he sold the cottage-sized restaurant—which his father founded as a mobile cart in 1921—that Chet Atkins portrait took a place in Townes's living room. For years it hung across from his favorite chair, one of nearly a hundred works in a house full of paintings and sculptures. Recently, though, eighty-eight-year-old Townes and his wife, Anne, learned of a Chet Atkins exhibit at the Country Music Hall of Fame. They moved the portrait, a drawing by Atkins's childhood friend Marvin Thompson, to the museum's permanent collection.

TOWNES'S COLLECTION INCLUDES Russian, Spanish, French, and American artwork. The thick brush strokes or delicate etchings transport viewers from the Wild West to the streets of Paris.

The art reflects his travels. Townes even has drawings by a man who bunked next to him during World War II. That's when he first took an interest in art. While stationed in Frankfurt at age twenty-three, he went on rest leave to Switzerland and France.

"They were just getting the art they had stored and hidden back in the galleries," he said. "A lot of guys wanted to go sit around and drink beer all day, and I said, 'No, I don't want to do that.' So I got into art."

Townes was drawn to many kinds of artistic expression, from vagabond musicians in parks to paintings at the Louvre. He was moved, too, by the stories behind the artists, such as Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's struggles with poverty.

Back home, Townes bought his first pieces—two small watercolors—in an alley off Jackson Square in New Orleans. He continued his education by reading about art and attending shows when he could.

"I went to a show in the basement at the Parthenon [in Nashville]," he said, remembering one of his first. "I got to know the director. He started eating at the restaurant."

Eventually Townes gathered enough works to make his own contributions to Nashville's Cheekwood Museum of Art and Belmont University. He helped some of his favorite artists, such as Robert Meredith, make their way, too, by hosting early exhibits.

But the key showings happened at his restaurant, where Townes gave his guests something beautiful to look at while they lined up for something nourishing to eat.

TOWNES OFTEN CARRIED pieces of his art collection to the restaurant to display, but it wasn't the main draw. Rather, customers lined up for the steam table that he manned, dishing roast beef, mashed potatoes, and homemade gravy. The griddle hissed with corn cakes. Tomatoes stewed. Pole beans simmered in cast-iron skillets.

"You'd have all those good smoky smells, because there was fatback cooked into the beans and the greens, and all the sizzly fried smells," Nancy Vienneau, restaurant critic for *The Tennessean*, said recently of the scene at Hap Townes Restaurant in the 1970s. "It was kind of like if you stepped into someone's country kitchen, because that's what it was."

Townes scooped stewed raisins. He ladled portions of squash casserole, which author and musician Shel Silverstein, a regular on his trips to Nashville, would order. No meat. No sides. The man who penned "A Boy Named Sue" just wanted a plate piled with casserole.

The restaurant drew a mix of writers, musicians, and music-industry folks. "You'd always see music people," Vienneau said. "They loved the food, and they loved Hap's way."

Of the serving line ritual, Vienneau recalled, "As he was spooning it on the plate, he was almost repeating what you were saying like an incantation. It was part of getting your order right, but also this connection with you."

Townes misses that connection. "I miss all the customers," he said. As for the art, he would say, back in the day, "I just brought this down here for the customers to enjoy."

Jennifer Justus is the food culture reporter for The Tennessean.
PAGE 2: *Hap Townes, 2006. Photograph by John Egerton.*

FROM **SICILY** TO THE **CRESCENT CITY**

THE BACKSTORY ON MUFFALETTAS

by Dana Logsdon

I'M A BAKER WHO DABBLES IN CULINARY HISTORY. As such, I've always been interested in the history of the muffaletta. Popular in New Orleans since at least the turn of the last century, the sandwich is a garlicky, pungent stack of olive salad, Genoa salami, ham, mortadella, provolone, and Swiss, layered on a golden round of sesame bread, cut into olive oil–soaked pie wedges and wrapped in paper.

Before I began my recent research, I knew the basics. What I didn't know was the muffaletta's backstory. How did it acquire its

name, and why it has survived through the decades in New Orleans while some other Italian-inspired foods have not?

That assignment proved tough. Many of the bakers and shopkeepers in early twentieth-century New Orleans did not publish menus or advertisements. The earliest written use of the word *muffaletta* may not have come until the 1950s, when the Sunrise Bakery advertised "muffuletta" bread. The first mention of the muffaletta as a sandwich probably occurred around the same time in an advertisement for Lakeview Grill, which suggested that diners "try our famous Italian muffaletta sandwich – a service for four," which "you slice like a pie."

This advertisement for Sunrise Bakery's muffuletta bread ran in the New Orleans Times-Picayune *on March 12, 1958. Image courtesy of America's Historical Newspapers Archive.*

To trace the origin of the bread on which that sandwich was based, I turned to *The Atlas of Sicilian Breads*, published by Sicily's Office of Agriculture and Tourism. That book calls *muffuletto* one of Sicily's classic breads. Due to the extra water used in the kneading process, muffuletto loaves have soft and spongy interiors. Most are round and flat. Some are topped with aromatic seeds, like sesame or fennel.

The Sicilian connection proved key. Arriving en masse to New Orleans in the late 1890s and early 1900s, they set up shops and bakeries around the French Market, home to a diversity of importers, groceries, and markets. Records from Solari's Importers show that Sicilian immigrants to New Orleans could buy everything they needed to make a muffaletta sandwich, from German and French hams and cheeses to Italian mortadellas and salamis.

Early Sicilian immigrants bought other goods they would have recognized back home, like ricotta, caciocavallo cheese, olive oil, and offal meats. With those ingredients, I learned that they also made vastedda sandwiches and sfincione pizzas, first culinary cousins to muffaletta sandwiches.

The vastedda, also called *pane con la milza* (which translates from the Italian as "bread with spleen"), is a traditional Palermitano sandwich. Still eaten today in Palermo, it is built on a muffaletta-like roll, dressed with melted lard, layered with fresh ricotta and cacciocavallo cheese, and capped with segments of boiled cow spleen.

When Angelo Brocato opened his ice cream shop in 1905 in the French Quarter, he began by producing ice cream in the summer months, and vastedda sandwiches in the winter months. But at some point, vasteddas disappeared from Brocato's menu and, in turn, faded from the New Orleans culinary landscape.

In that same era, sfincione pizza—a type of spongy flat bread—was sold in New Orleans by roving bread men. Although there were several types in Sicily, the version baked in New Orleans was topped with onions, tomato gravy, anchovies, caciocavallo cheese, oregano, and toasted bread crumbs. Like the vastedda, the sfincione is no longer a commercial product, but it is baked in some homes during the Christmas holidays.

Today, even as I revel in my newfound muffaletta knowledge, I grow sad when I think about the virtual disappearance of vasteddas and sfinciones from our gastronomic landscape. What's more, as a baker, I mourn the traditional Sicilian bakeries we've lost. Ace Bakery, run by the Aiovolasti family, has faded. So has United Bakery, the pride and joy of Sal Lo Giudice, decimated by the floods that followed Hurricane Katrina.

Muffalettas, however, survive. Despite the demise of our old-guard bakeries, these sandwiches serve as dynamic twenty-first-century symbols of Sicilian immigrants' lasting impact on New Orleans culinary culture.

Dana Logsdon, a former owner of La Spiga Bakery in New Orleans, bakes and listens to the stories at Angelo Brocato's Ice Cream and Confectionery.
PAGE 5: New Orleans, 1936. Photograph by Walker Evans. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

SLOW-ROASTED BROAD BEANS

by Sheila and Matt Neal of Neal's Deli, Carrboro, North Carolina

WE THINK OF OUR PASTRAMI PLATE AS A MODERN MEAT-AND-TWO, built around our house-smoked pastrami and a couple of side dishes from the deli case. Broad beans, also known as Roma beans, are one of our favorite sides at the deli. We serve this dish every year when they are plentiful. (We cook most of our sides with vegetables procured from nearby farmers.) They make a great plate with our pastrami and creamy coleslaw. This is a great entertainment dish: It's economical, it feeds a crowd without too much work for the cook, and it tastes better if made a day ahead.

INGREDIENTS

2 ½ lbs. broad beans (also called Roma beans), rinsed and stemmed
½ cup peeled and thinly sliced garlic
2 cups diced yellow onion
2 medium-sized tomatoes, grated*
1 teaspoon granulated sugar
½ teaspoon black pepper, coarsely ground
¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
1 tablespoon, plus 1 teaspoon kosher salt
3 bay leaves
1 cup water
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

PROCEDURE

Heat oven to 350 degrees.

Gently and thoroughly combine all the above ingredients in a roasting pan. Place parchment paper directly onto the beans. Cover the pan with a tight-fitting lid or foil. Cook until the beans are tender, stirring well every 15 minutes for about an hour and 15 minutes. Keeps well for 3 days.

** This is a great trick we try and share with everyone. The easiest way to "peel" tomatoes is to grate them. Cut the tomato in half, and with your fingers remove as many seeds as you can. Place the cut side of the tomato down on the coarse holes of a box grater. Run the tomato back and forth until all the flesh is grated and you are left with the skin. Discard the skin.*

Photograph by Sara Camp Arnold.

PRAISEWORTHY PLATE LUNCHES

JC'S KITCHEN, A MEAT-AND-THREE WITH A MISSION

by Emily Wallace

JC DOESN'T COOK. Regulars know better at JC's Kitchen, a meat-and-three housed in a squat, buttery-yellow building that sticks out amid the townhouses near the corner of Main and Fayetteville streets in Durham, North Carolina.

"It's a form of witnessing to say they stand for Jesus Christ," says Phyllis Terry, a petite woman with wide eyes and a constant grin, of the restaurant's initials. The definition can be inferred from the interior of the building, where inspirational plaques adorn the walls, gospel music pipes from a CD player, and a Bible rests open by the cash register.

Crisp, hand-painted lettering on the side of the building makes the mission explicit: WHERE THE FOOD IS ANOINTED AND YOU WON'T BE DISAPPOINTED.

I had no doubt about the anointing. The restaurant is a spiritual place. But on my first visit, I wondered if the food would let me down—especially when Terry confessed that the vegetables are cooked with smoked turkey in place of a more traditional slab of pork.

Hesitation was unwarranted. The greens—a mix of chopped collards and cabbage—were bitter, sweet, and beautifully smoky. And the fried okra was just as it should be: slightly crisp and lightly breaded. I also enjoyed a hindquarter of fried chicken, drenched in a sweet batch of barbecue sauce.

But the standout dish was oxtails, marinated for hours before they were stewed. Served over rice, the meat pulled away from the bones in tender shreds that tasted like a gamier version of pot roast.

Many of the recipes at JC's come from Terry's mother, who cooked for her church and her family of nine children. She was "the number one cook in Durham," Terry says. As a result, all of the Lee siblings learned her recipes. "We grew up knowing what it was to cook," she says. "That was inherited."

Terry never intended to own a restaurant. She spent nearly twenty years living and working in Africa, India, and, most recently, Japan. Instead, two of Terry's siblings, Charles Lee and Sheilah Lee, coveted careers in cooking.

Around 1997, Charles turned an existing meat-and-three into his own place, which he dubbed Lee's. One year later, he gave it over to Sheilah, who refashioned it as JC's and devised the restaurant's slogan.

Under Sheilah's watch, the place became much more than a restaurant. "It was an outreach center to help the destitute and down and out," says Terry. "It was her passion. She clothed people and fed them."

In 2008, Sheilah became ill with cancer. Upon her death that year, Durham's *Herald-Sun* wrote, "If you were down on your luck, you didn't so much need to have a grip on your bootstraps if the late Sheilah Lee had any say in the matter—she was the type who'd pull you up herself."

Terry didn't want her sister's mission to fade, so she returned from Japan to take over the restaurant. "We're living out of seeds she planted in the community," she says of the current business.

To honor her sister's work, Terry recently remodeled the interior of the building, removing a long lunch counter to make room for new booths and tables, and painting the walls bright brick-orange, teal, and yellow.

Her plan is to draw more customers to the restaurant—and draw more people to J.C.

Emily Wallace of Durham, North Carolina, writes and draws for the Independent Weekly, *where she contributes a regular column on meat-and-threes and where a version of this article originally appeared.* PREVIOUS PAGE: *Photograph by Emily Wallace.*

A DIFFERENT KIND OF

PLANE FOOD

HOW FAR WOULD YOU GO FOR K&W?

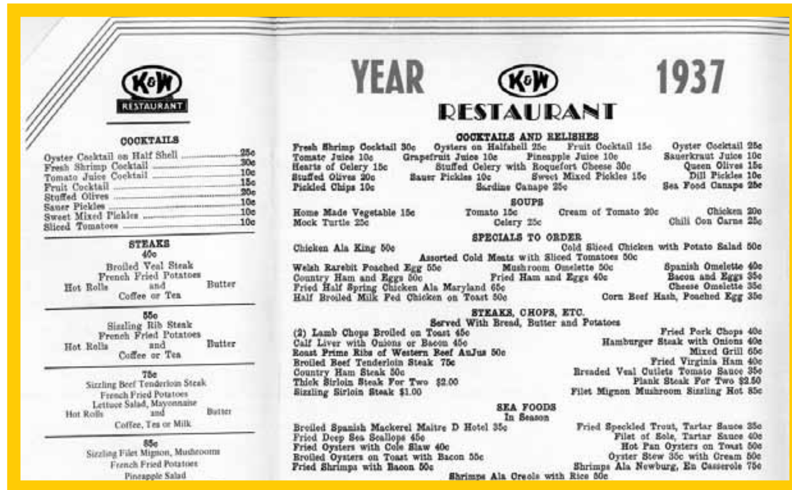
by Kat Kinsman

SEVERAL STORIES ABOVE MANHATTAN'S CENTRAL PARK, there hangs a three-Michelin-starred, monstrously expensive restaurant that an awful lot of people think is perfect. I may have thought that, too, at one point, but I know it's not, because I've been to the K&W Cafeteria.

Actually, I'm going to back that up and admit out loud in public that I have in fact boarded a plane, rented a hotel room, and stayed overnight in a city several states away for the express purpose of sitting down with a groaning tray of K&W chicken livers, fried okra, collard greens, and vegetable congeal and eating my greedy head off.

Yes, I made some preemptory noises about going to visit a couple of old friends who live in relative proximity to a K&W. I brought them along with me so I could steal hush puppies off their plates. And their child's. I have no shame. And the trip cost just slightly less than my single meal at the aforementioned palace of gastronomic fanciness.

There clearly are many, many things wrong with me as a human being, but if you've eaten at a K&W, you know my love of the place is not one of them.



K&W RESTAURANT

COCKTAILS

Oyster Cocktail on Half Shell 25c
Fresh Shrimp Cocktail 30c
Tomato Juice Cocktail 10c
Fruit Cocktail 15c
Stuffed Olives 20c
Sauer Pickles 10c
Sweet Mixed Pickles 10c
Sliced Tomatoes 10c

STEAKS

40c
Broiled Veal Steak
French Fried Potatoes
Hot Rolls and Butter
Coffee or Tea

55c
Sizzling Rib Steak
French Fried Potatoes
Hot Rolls and Butter
Coffee or Tea

75c
Sizzling Beef Tenderloin Steak
French Fried Potatoes
Lettuce Salad, Mayonnaise
Hot Rolls and Butter
Coffee, Tea or Milk

85c
Sizzling Filet Mignon, Mushrooms
French Fried Potatoes
Pineapple Salad

YEAR K&W 1937
RESTAURANT

COCKTAILS AND RELISHES

Fresh Shrimp Cocktail 30c Oysters on Halfshell 25c Fruit Cocktail 15c Oyster Cocktail 25c
Tomato Juice 10c Grapefruit Juice 10c Pineapple Juice 10c Sauerkraut Juice 10c
Hearts of Celery 15c Stuffed Celery with Roquefort Cheese 30c Queen Olives 15c
Stuffed Olives 20c Sauer Pickles 10c Sweet Mixed Pickles 15c Dill Pickles 10c
Pickled Chips 10c Sardine Canape 25c Sea Food Canape 25c

SOUPS

Home Made Vegetable 15c Tomato 15c Cream of Tomato 20c Chicken 20c
Mock Turtle 25c Celery 25c Chili Con Carne 25c

SPECIALS TO ORDER

Chicken Ala King 50c Cold Sliced Chicken with Potato Salad 50c
Assorted Cold Meats with Sliced Tomatoes 50c
Welsh Rarebit Poached Egg 55c Mushroom Omelette 50c Spanish Omelette 40c
Country Ham and Eggs 50c Fried Ham and Eggs 40c Bacon and Eggs 35c
Fried Half Spring Chicken Ala Maryland 65c Cheese Omelette 35c
Half Broiled Milk Fed Chicken on Toast 50c Corn Beef Hash, Poached Egg 35c

STEAKS, CHOPS, ETC.
Served With Bread, Butter and Potatoes

(2) Lamb Chops Broiled on Toast 45c Fried Pork Chops 40c
Calf Liver with Onions or Bacon 45c Hamburger Steak with Onions 40c
Roast Prime Ribs of Western Beef AuJus 50c Mixed Grill 65c
Broiled Beef Tenderloin Steak 75c Fried Virginia Ham 40c
Country Ham Steak 50c Breaded Veal Cutlets Tomato Sauce 35c
Thick Sirloin Steak For Two $2.00 Plank Steak For Two $2.50
Sizzling Sirloin Steak $1.00 Filet Mignon Mushroom Sizzling Hot 85c

SEA FOODS
In Season

Broiled Spanish Mackerel Maitre D Hotel 35c Fried Speckled Trout, Tartar Sauce 35c
Fried Deep Sea Scallops 45c Filet of Sole, Tartar Sauce 40c
Fried Oysters with Cole Slaw 40c Hot Pan Oysters on Toast 50c
Broiled Oysters on Toast with Bacon 55c Oyster Stew 35c with Cream 50c
Fried Shrimps with Bacon 50c Shrimps Ala Newburg, En Casserole 75c
Shrimps Ala Creole with Rice 50c

THAT WOULDN'T ALWAYS HAVE BEEN THE CASE. Though a Sunday après-church K&W dining room is now typically a multi-racial, trans-generational, pan-denominational assembly of Southerners possessed of great appreciation for fancy church hats and rock-bottom prices, in the early 1960s, several outposts found themselves at the center of the battle over segregation.

The original location, which had been doing business since 1937 in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, as K&W Restaurant (the initials stood for original investors T.K. Knight and his brothers-in-law, Thomas, Kenneth, and William Wilson) was acquired by Grady T. Allred in 1941. Allred opened a second location in High Point and eventually converted both locations from restaurants to cafeterias in the 1950s.

As the chain expanded further, folks across the state clamored for the low-priced fare. They were all welcome to it—but not necessarily on the premises.

In an interview for the University of North Carolina's Southern Oral History Program commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Reverend David Forbes made mention of K&W desegregation struggles in Raleigh. Willena Cannon recalled in *Through Survivors' Eyes: From the Sixties to the Greensboro Massacre*, "We could not get served at other places, like the K&W Cafeteria, which had good food and nice tables. If we wanted to eat K&W food, we had to go to a window and buy the food and then walk down the street to eat it. We couldn't go inside. That kind of stuff causes a lot of pain inside you."

Spurred by the local Woolworth sit-ins, Cannon, along with around four thousand of her classmates, protested peacefully for integration, occupying a Greensboro intersection as paddy wagons pushed into them, attempting to mow them down. So many were arrested that the jails in several surrounding towns filled up and other buildings were converted into holding facilities. Cannon notes that she, like Forbes and countless others, was indeed willing to give her very life and freedom for the cause.

It did not, thankfully, come to that—though K&W's owners did their best to thwart the efforts of protestors who'd vowed to remain in jail until the chain served black people. The president of the historically black North Carolina A&T State University told students that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. would be speaking on campus, and they had to leave the jail to see him. It was a trick to lure the students out, and the restaurants remained segregated until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 forced K&W to open its doors to all customers.

It was about time. Reverend Forbes recalled, "Either they were going to be prepared to kill us all, or something had to give."

Nowadays, on a given Tuesday afternoon, a person of any race, creed, or color is perfectly welcome to stroll into a K&W for a ham steak with gravy and to eat that meal while sitting down comfortably at a freshly bussed table.

Even those of us deranged enough to fork out roughly $500 for the privilege of doing so.

Kat Kinsman is the managing editor of Eatocracy, *CNN's food blog. Image courtesy of K&W Cafeterias.*

BANANA-MAYONNAISE SANDWICH ON WHITE BREAD, Deal Orchards, Taylorsville, North Carolina. Photograph by Kate Medley, November 2009.

I was there to photograph the apple harvest. Around lunchtime, I went inside the on-farm general store to get a snack. Settled onto the front porch next to this fellow. He was chowing down on his sandwich. We got to talking. I asked him how his lunch was, to which he replied, "I don't much care for it. I tell my wife every time that I don't much care for her banana and mayonnaise sandwiches, but she just keeps making them. And I keep eating them. What I'd give to have a ham sandwich one of these days."

The gentleman was in his late seventies and had been employed in the apple industry for most of his life. He didn't want me to take his picture, but he wasn't opposed to my photographing his sandwich.

—Kate Medley

IF YOU'RE READING THIS IN A RESTAURANT OR STORE,
it's yours for the taking.

IF YOU'RE READING THIS AT HOME,
and you're not yet an SFA member, please join at www.southernfoodways.org.

IF YOU ARE AN SFA MEMBER,
well, thank you.

THE MISSION of the Southern Foodways Alliance is to document, study, and celebrate the diverse food cultures of the changing American South.

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