

Gravy

"I'm selling my pork chops, but I'm giving my gravy away." - Memphis Minnie

Number 7, Spring 2002

News from the Southern Foodways Alliance

Feast Here Tonight: A Benefit for Ronni Yields More than \$25,000

On February 8, Louisville Kentucky restaurateurs joined with Southern Foodways Alliance authors and chefs to host *Feast Here Tonight: A Benefit for Ronni*. Thanks to the generosity of numerous friends, more than \$25,000 was raised to benefit Ronni Lundy, an SFA founder who was diagnosed with ovarian cancer late last year. The benefit was sponsored in part by Brown-Forman, the Camberley Brown Hotel, FSA Group, Gourmet magazine, Hawley-Cooke Booksellers, the Seelbach Hilton, the Southern Foodways Alliance, White Lily, and Woodford Reserve.

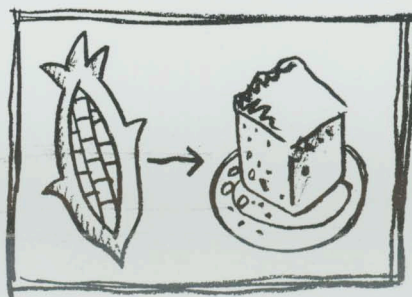
Sad News: Jeanne Voltz Passes

Jeanne Voltz, a founding member of the SFA, passed away in January. She was 81. Over the course of a long and fruitful career, she served as food editor of the *Miami Herald*, the *Los Angeles Times* and *Woman's Day*. Her *Barbecued Ribs, Smoked Butts and Other Great Feeds* won a James Beard Award. "She tackled food as a journalist back when many food sections were still put out by the advertising department," wrote Kathleen Purvis in a *Charlotte Observer* obituary. "She was determined about covering food and about getting it right." Jeanne Voltz will be missed.

Cornbread Nation *Hot out of the Oven*

With this issue, the SFA's newsletter, *Cornbread Nation*, is reborn as *Gravy: News from the Southern Foodways Alliance*. Why did we change? Well, we lost our newsletter title to our colleagues – John Egerton, Lolis Eric Elie, Jessica Harris, and Fred Sauceman – who have compiled and edited a book, *Cornbread Nation: The Best of Southern Food Writing*, to be published by the University of North Carolina Press. The editors see *Cornbread Nation* as the SFA's calling card, a physical manifestation of our myriad passions. We think you will concur. Among the contributors are Roy Blount Jr., Rick Bragg, Nikki Giovanni, and a host of fellow SFA members. Look for copies at your local bookstore in October.

And keep in mind: Editorial fees for *Cornbread Nation* were funded, in part, by a generous gift from the Atticus Trust, a Brown family trust based in Louisville, Kentucky.



Oral History Campaign Begins

The SFA celebrates, teaches, preserves and promotes the diverse food cultures of the American South. Fundamental to achieving these goals is the collection and dissemination of oral histories that tell the life stories and explicate the life works of the standard bearers of the culinary arts.

To date, the SFA has enjoyed modest success, capturing for posterity the words and deeds of people like Alabama barbecue man Van Sykes and Louisiana filé maker Lionel Key. This January, with the financial support of the Crisco company, we began a broader and more systemic effort, collecting oral histories of baking in the South. In cooperation with graduate students at the Center for Public History at the State University of West Georgia in Carrollton and the Center for the Study of Southern Culture here at The University of Mississippi, we have interviewed bakers of angel biscuits and hot water cornbread, not to mention pecan pie, chess pie and blackberry cobbler – all the while striving to tell the larger story of life in the South by way of our region's folkways.

And now, with the financial support of the National Pork Council, we have begun collecting oral histories from pitmasters, those men and women who work the barbecue pits of the South, shoveling hickory embers beneath splayed hogs. Already in the can are interviews with men like James Willis of Memphis, Tennessee. When graduate student Brian Fisher asked him about the importance of sauce, Willis replied:

"People can holler about it, but now I just tell you a fact that with barbecue – you got to have a sauce. You ain't got a sauce. You ain't got no barbecue...Now, if you cook barbecue all day long and you ain't got no good sauce, you ain't got no barbecue. Sauce separates you from the money. Make a good sauce, you make the money."

Look for interviews, photographs and supporting research to go live on our website - www.southernfoodways.com - in the not too distant future.



Field Trip, A Taste of Texas Barbecue, Sold Out

If you have not already registered for our second Field Trip, **A Taste of Texas Barbecue**, to be held June 14-15 in and around the city of Austin, well, you're too late. We sold out, and we now have a wait list. Over the course of a day and half, we will explore the foodways of Central Texas, a region where cultural, ethnic, geographic, and agricultural forces converged to create a world-class barbecue culture.



Soul of Southern Cooking
Kathy Starr
New South Books, \$17.95

Originally published in 1989 by the University Press of Mississippi, this evocative portrait of the foodways of the Mississippi Delta has been out of print for far too long. Thanks to New South Books, a paperback edition is now back on bookstore shelves. Travel with Starr to the Delta hamlet of Hollandale and pull up a chair. Listen as she tells you of life with her grandmother Miz Bob, proprietor of the Fair Deal Café: "My grand mama says if you leave the kitchen you take the air with you and the water goes out of the pot....[s]o, when you're cooking, you need to stay right there with it, and that's the truth."

Consider the Eel
Richard Schweid
University of North Carolina Press, \$24.95

Schweid is the author of *Catfish and the Delta: Confederate Farm Fishing in the Mississippi Delta* and *The Cockroach Papers: A Compendium of History and Lore*. With *Consider the Eel*, the Barcelona, Spain-based author turns his attention to another one of God's forlorn creatures. The result is a wonderful interdisciplinary investigation, a work that might well serve as a model for aspiring writers with a yen to explore foodways.

But don't despair. If you weren't one of the lucky eighty registrants and you're still pining for some smoky Texas 'cue, you can take solace in a perusal of Robb Walsh's new book, *Legends of Texas Barbecue: Recipes and Recollections from the Pit Bosses*. In addition to making an appearance at the Austin event, Robb will be presenting a paper, "Cotton Pickers in the Meat Market: The Origins of the Texas Barbecue Business," at this year's Southern Foodways Symposium scheduled for October 17-20 here in Oxford.

And if you happen to find yourself in Austin before or after the Field Trip, be sure to drop in on one of the two restauranteurs who are acting as our hosts for the weekend: Hoover Alexander and Eddie Wilson.



Hoover Alexander, a veteran of more than 25 years in the restaurant business, was raised in East Austin. Since 1996 he has been the chef and owner of Hoover's Cooking, where he pays homage to his mother's cooking. Hoover's Cooking - 2002 Manor Rd., 512-479-5006

Eddie Wilson is proprietor of the phenomenon known as Threadgill's. Open since 1933, this temple of Southern home cooking has played host to some of the nation's best pickers and singers. Wilson is also the author of *Threadgill's: The Cookbook*, which includes a comic book history of the restaurant. Threadgill's - 301 W. Riverside Dr., 512-472-9304; 6416 N. Lamar, 512-459-3855.

Lowcountry Cuisine Conference

The College of Charleston Program in the Carolina Lowcountry and the Atlantic World, together with Johnson & Wales University in Charleston, South Carolina will sponsor a March 20-22, 2003 conference on Carolina Lowcountry and Caribbean Cuisines. The programming committee seeks proposals of original scholarship on the development of Lowcountry cuisine. Inquiries should be directed to Jeffrey Pilcher, Department of History, The Citadel, Charleston, SC 29409, or pilcherj@citadel.edu.

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