Loin for lonza, quarters for prosciuttoSugar, yeast,
  meal, and raisin make cake out of boiled backbone.
  Drop liver, heart, and kidney fresh in a grease,

sizzle with some pepper, salt, and onion.
  Scramble brains with eggs and fry.
  Cut fat and skin in bits, boil them in a cauldron

for the family lard—year supply.
  Muddy man-shadows making rag soap, scald
  waste fat and mix it up with lye.

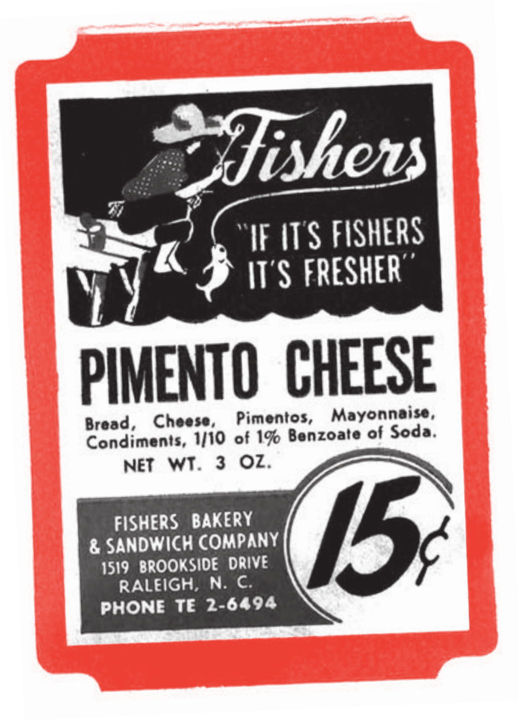
Only hair, hoof, intestine goop, and teeth get culled.
  No smokehouse, no stable,
  so we move inside. Papa rub a thick coat a salt

in a fat slab. We store it on the cypress table
  in my leaky room, where it smells
  up my dreams. Dirty snow buries my Bible,

chills my bed. Through knotholes
  in the floor of my head, I see a red-eye rabid dog
  and I'm skeered every night when the black blanket falls,

I'll feed a snorting ghost ripped from a hog.

Greg Alan Brownderville, whose first collection of poems, entitled *Gust*, will be published in the fall of 2011 by Northwestern University Press, is a native of Pumpkin Bend, Arkansas, and a professor of English at Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri.



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PIMENTO CHEESE IN THE NORTH CAROLINA PIEDMONT

From home to work and back again

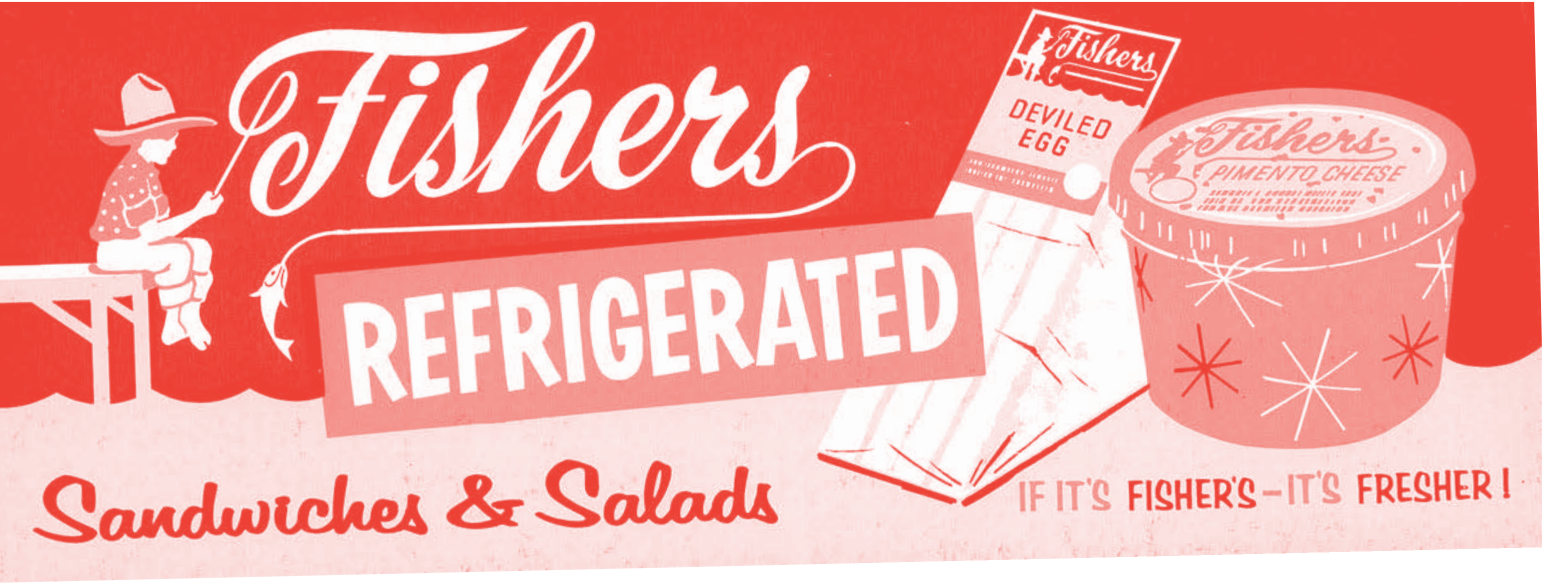
by Emily Wallace

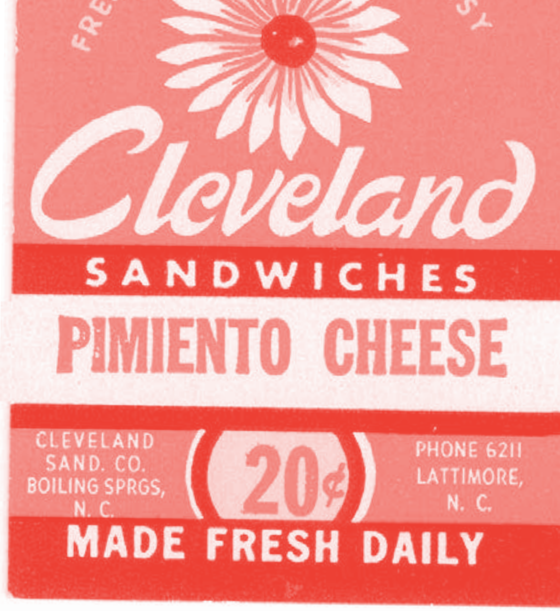
IN EARLY NOVEMBER, my aunt sent an e-mail to my extended family with a plan for Thanksgiving. The standbys were there—my mother would bring pecan pie; my Aunt Judy, deviled eggs; and so on. But then came a new suggestion. My name appeared with pimento cheese.

A month before, I'd wrapped up my master's thesis in folklore on the subject, and what the holiday e-mail made clear was that my relatives were eager to taste the results. Though no definitive recipe for the spread appears in my work, I made a batch and presented it with a plate of crackers at our Thanksgiving dinner. My family cooed.

"So this is what you came up with? It's good," they told me. But in their eyes, what I'd brought to the table was, in fact, nothing new. I'm pretty sure that my cousins thought their mother's recipe superior to mine, and, as each of my relatives had mentioned or forwarded me an article about pimento cheese at some point, they knew that I was definitely not the first to pen something about the spread.

Almost every national newspaper or magazine, it seems, has made some mention of pimento cheese in the last year. And forget just slapping it on bread or crackers. More and more menus tack

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the spread onto some other type of food—from burgers and ribeyes to fish, eggs, grits, and pizza. Pimento cheese is everywhere, falling on the side of overwrought and over-served. So what, my family wanted to know, did I have to say about it? To their surprise, it was something about them.

> What began as a delicacy served throughout the country to the upper class in the early 1900s had become a favorite food of the working class. ”

My relatives have roots in Albemarle, North Carolina, a former mill town in the Piedmont where a day of rain carves out orange puddles almost as bright and gooey as the famed store-bought cheese spreads that Reynolds Price has labeled “congealed insecticides.” But on the Wiscassett Mill Hill, an area of company-owned housing where my mother grew up, Ruth’s and Star’s, the type of pimento cheese that Mr. Price has deemed inedible, were a staple and sustainer.

“I can’t remember opening my grandmother’s refrigerator without seeing pimento cheese there,” my mother has told me of her youth. But the way she tells it, my family never ate pimento cheese at home. Rather, she says, “The pimento cheese at that house always took me to work. You know, we never had sandwiches as meals at home. We always sat down at the table and you ate a hot meal, three meals a day. And so it was never there for a meal at home. It was there for work.” And work, for many in the Piedmont of North Carolina (including my mother for a while), meant a cotton mill. There, particularly after the 1920s, formalized meal breaks were replaced by dope carts—wagons that wheeled through mills selling the likes of sandwiches and “dopes” (colas)—and employees were encouraged to stretch out their work and eat as they found time.

By the 1950s, sandwiches found their way into mill commissaries and vending machines, and refrigerated spreads like pimento cheese, chicken salad, and egg salad secured a permanent and affordable place on the Southern grocery shelf. Of those, pimento cheese became the most iconic. What began as a delicacy served throughout the country to the upper class in the early 1900s became a favorite food of the working class. Its availability was fueled by a lower cost of processed cheese—a food popularized during WWI—and an abundance of pimento peppers, which thrived in Southern soil and could be economically processed in the region’s factories rather than imported from Spain.

Throughout the Southern Piedmont, companies sprouted up with pimento cheese as a flagship product. Among such entrepreneurs was George Bell, whose family began Star Food Products by securing contracts with Burlington Industries, once the world's largest producer of textiles. As Bell puts it, his company wasn't alone: "After WWII, there was a [start-up] in Greensboro, there was a company in Durham, there was a company in Louisburg, there was a company in Kinston, there was a company in Concord. Charlotte had a couple. Gastonia had one. Roanoke. Oh yeah, there were a bunch of them."

A number of these companies remain. While working on my thesis, I stopped at various relatives' houses before donning a hairnet and conducting an interview at a factory nearby. A visit with my cousin Leigh coincided with a trip to Ruth's Salads in Charlotte. On a trek up to my aunt and uncle's home in Johnson City, Tennessee, I met Ed Simerly, vice president of Moody Dunbar, the leading canner of pimentos in the nation.

"Can you believe that all of those pimentos are tied to Johnson City?" my aunt asked at Thanksgiving. But that wasn't half of it.

"Approximately eighty percent of pimento cheese spreads are sold in eleven Southeastern markets," Simerly told me, with Raleigh-Durham and Charlotte ranking as the two biggest pimento cheese–consuming locales. It's a staggering number, which reveals that, though a lot of the industries that first supported widespread production and consumption of pimento cheese have come and gone, the spread continues to prosper and find new relevance in the South and beyond.

It's a gussied-up topping. It's a staple sandwich. It's a catalyst for factory and restaurant jobs. P.C. even made possible a master's thesis.

Emily Wallace recently completed her MA in folklore at UNC-Chapel Hill and contributes regularly to Raleigh-Durham's *Independent Weekly*. Fishers images courtesy of Tom Fisher. Cleveland image courtesy of Emily Wallace.

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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Thank you