



Gravy

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

Number 13, Winter 2003

SFA Launches Endowment Campaign

BY MATTHEW ROWLEY
SFA SECRETARY/TREASURER

Ole Miss alumni Ron and Becky Feder, principals of the R&B Feder Charitable Foundation for the Beau Arts of Ocean Springs, Mississippi, helped launch the Southern Foodways Alliance's endowment fund during this October's Southern Foodways Symposium with a \$5,000 challenge grant to members. The grant is the first installment of a ten-year pledge totaling \$50,000. SFA members attending the symposium met and bested that challenge, raising over \$11,000 in additional funds during the weekend.

One of the SFA's most critical and pressing needs is an endowment that serves as a permanent and reliable source of funding for the events and programs that support its mission. Today, almost all operating expenses -- nearly \$100,000 annually -- must be raised through the efforts of SFA staff. As the organization grows, however, demands on staff resources grow. This endowment will relieve some of the pressure to raise funds. Staff can then dedicate more of their expertise to assuring the same high quality of scholarship and service that members and the public have come to expect.

Interest earned on the endowment's premium will provide funds for operational expenses such as supplies, printing, and postage, as well as for salaries, special events, and scholarships. Further, it will provide seed money for some of our biggest aspirations. Chief among those is a thorough compilation of oral histories about current, historic, and endangered foodways of the American South. A close second is planning for a public museum, library, and archives.

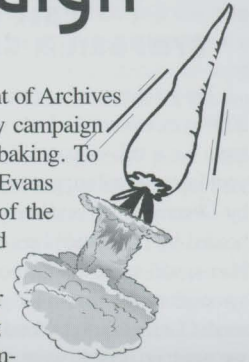
Projects such as these were once only dreams. Now, they are becoming reality. An initial collection of SFA archival materials, for instance, is on

deposit at the University of Mississippi Department of Archives and Special Collections. Likewise, the oral history campaign has already produced histories on barbecue and baking. To manage that project, the board recently hired Amy Evans as a part-time facilitator. Amy, a recent graduate of the Southern Studies master's program, was the lead researcher on our Tennessee barbecue project.

Both the University of Mississippi and the Center for the Study of Southern Culture are working closely with the SFA to develop the endowment campaign. The University of Mississippi Foundation will administer the endowment. All funds raised will be dedicated exclusively to the Southern Foodways Alliance.

The initial round of donations to the endowment came from SFA members, the board, the staff of the Center, even symposium speakers. A case in point: Jim 'N Nick's Bar-B-Q of Birmingham, Alabama, responded to the challenge with a pledge of \$3,000. Others may choose to contribute anonymously or make donations in another's name. All contributions are fully tax-deductible and can be made by check, credit card, or pledge.

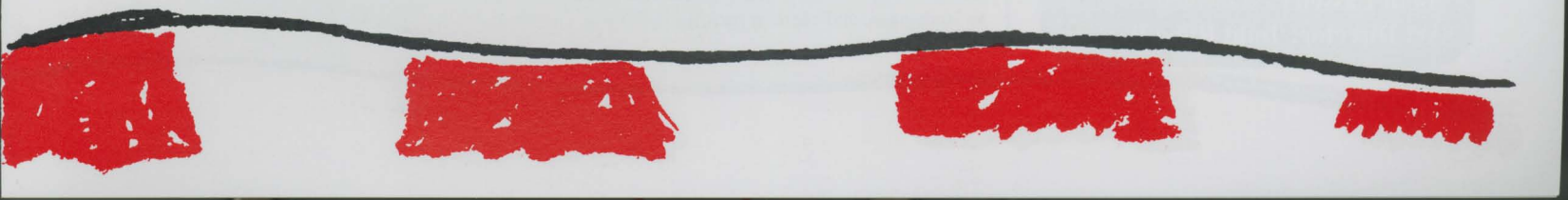
The Southern Foodways Alliance has always been a member-driven organization. I urge each member with a development or philanthropic background to continue that tradition by contacting me at sfaendowment@olemiss.edu or 215-432-4348 to offer advice and leadership on the endowment campaign. I am eager to discuss fundraising strategy, leads, and developing promotional materials.



LEE SMITH'S MAMA'S BREAD RECIPE

On Sunday morning at this year's symposium, North Carolina novelist Lee Smith spoke movingly and humorously of the influence of her mother, Gig, a home economics teacher and natural storyteller, on her life and work. She still makes many of her mother's recipes, including this one for her loaf bread, which she made every week. "I make this bread often myself," Lee Smith says, "because the smell of it baking in the oven brings my mother back to me so vividly."

Scald together 2 1/2 cups milk, 3 tablespoons sugar, 1 teaspoon salt, and 4 tablespoons Crisco. When lukewarm, add 2 well-beaten eggs and 2 packages yeast (dissolved in warm water). Add flour to make a medium stiff dough: 7 to 8 cups. Let rise until double in bulk. Knead well. Shape into loaves in greased pans. Let rise till double in size. Bake at 350 degrees for 35 to 40 minutes, till well browned. Grease loaves with butter or margarine when you take out of pans. Cool.



MEMBER NEWS

If you have news or projects you'd like to let other SFA members know about, please e-mail them to Tom Head at thomashead@thomashead.com. Please keep submissions to about 50 words.

Kathleen Purvis, a food journalist in Charlotte, North Carolina, is working on a book on funeral food in America. She needs information on funeral food history, including estate inventories, journals, and letters that list foods served; family stories; or recipes. She's also looking for families that still do cemetery cleanings, and members of active burial societies. Reply to kpurvis@charlotteobserver.com, or 704-358-5236, or at 1222 Chandler Place, Charlotte, NC 28211.

ATTENTION!

CALL FOR SYMPOSIUM SUGGESTIONS

Do you know of a speaker we should invite to the 2004 symposium? Or have you come upon the perfect topic for a talk or panel discussion? The SFA seeks your input. Email suggestions to sfemail@olemiss.edu by December 25, and the programming committee, headed by board members Adrian Miller and Jessica Harris, will work to incorporate the best into our fall symposium. Keep two things in mind before you hit send: Our topic is to be food and race. 50 words are all we want; no need to write an opus.

PROGRAMMING UPDATE

MARK YOUR CALENDERS

For 2004, we focus upon Southern Foodways in Black & White. Through an emphasis upon food and race relations, we will redefine what an organization like this can accomplish. Mark your calendars now for the tentative June 4-6 Field Trip to Birmingham and the definite October 7-10 symposium in Oxford.

GRAVY

WINTER 2003, NUMBER 13

- **Editor: Thomas Head**
(thomashead@thomashead.com)
- **Associate Editor: Krista Reese**
(kdreese@mindspring.com)
- **Associate Editor: Jeff Siegel**
(jeff.siegel@worldnet.att.net)
- **Director: John T Edge**
(johnet@olemiss.edu)
- **Brains of the Operation: Mary Beth Lasseter** (sfa@olemiss.edu)
- **Art Director: Todd Rone Parker**

Rainbow Trout and Southern Caviar: A Tale of Southern Persistence

BY FRED SAUCEMAN

Canton, North Carolina—The roe of the American rainbow trout was once a discarded by-product of the filleting process. Now, thanks to the perseverance of a Western North Carolina family, it is the centerpiece of elegant receptions, informal tailgate parties, and restaurant degustation menus.

Back in 1986, the principals of Sunburst Trout Company -- Sally Eason, Steve Eason, and Sally's father, Dick Jennings -- almost gave up the trout farming business. The severe drought of that summer pushed water temperatures at Sunburst to 73 degrees, a lethal level for rainbow trout, and every fish in the crowded raceways perished.

Dick reconsidered his own father's advice: "Don't stay in these mountains, you'll starve." But instead of packing up and moving, the family started over, investing in a liquid oxygen machine that filters the mountain water and helps keep the temperature within acceptable ranges.

"The summer of 2003 has been our best season ever for growing trout," says Sally. "It has rained almost continuously since early spring, allowing us to feed the fish plenty, since we don't have to worry about stressing them out because the water's too warm."

Sunburst is the only trout farm in the country that has its floating food specially milled. The Sunburst blend contains no animal by-products, no hormones, and no antibiotics.

At mealtime, the water in the roiling raceways slaps and splashes against the concrete walls. The rainbows and golden trout swim in separate raceways, but occasionally an overly energetic fish vaults over the wall. Goldens are simply hybrid rainbows, "about the color of goldfish in a pet store but much bigger," as Sally describes them. "They're harder to grow, more prone to disease, but their pink flesh and gold skin are the prettiest thing you ever saw in a seafood counter."

The sound of falling water is constant in this verdant mountain setting. The water's source is the Shining Rock Wilderness Area in the Pisgah National Forest. From there, it flows into man-made Lake Logan, and over a dam at 12,000 gallons a minute into the Sunburst system, consisting of more than 20 raceways.

Sunburst first smoked trout in the back end of a tractor-trailer. Leftover pieces that didn't look attractive enough to be packaged were blended into a trout dip, still sold today. For smoking, Sunburst uses locally available hickory and grapevines from the vineyards at nearby Biltmore Estates. They smoke the fish for four hours, cool it to 36 degrees, and vacuum pack it.

Caviar, Sally says, has turned into "quite a full-time business on the side." The eggs are a striking peachy-orange color, buttery in flavor with a noticeable "pop" in the mouth.

"We use only 3 percent salt, compared to the classic Beluga caviar, which is about 8 percent," says Sally. "When you first taste trout caviar, there's that little hint of fish, and then there's no aftertaste."

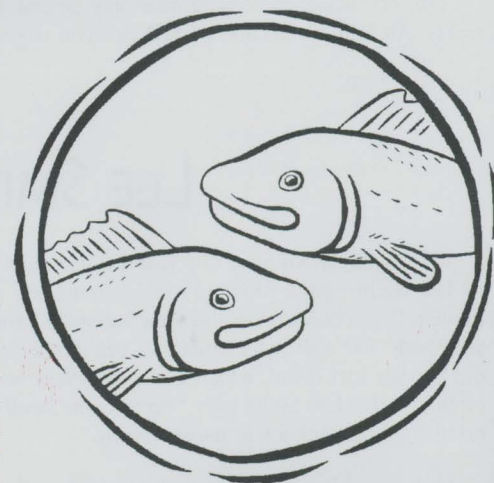
When Sunburst hosted members of the Southern Foodways Alliance this summer, they served caviar on half-dollar-sized blini with crème fraiche, capers, minced onions, and a local sparkling wine. "The eggs roll around like little jewels on the tongue," commented Laura Stanley in *Wine Spectator* magazine.

Grocery stores in Western North Carolina and all along the eastern seaboard carry Sunburst products, but Sunburst ships products directly to any part of the country.

"Our web page is our best way of beating foreign competition," says 79-year-old Dick Jennings, who, in 1931, first walked the winding paths in the shadows of Cold Mountain and fished local streams with worms snagged from a Prince Albert can.

Seventeen years later, Dick dropped out of engineering school at Yale (despite stellar grades), and soon formed the first commercial trout farm in the South, thereby establishing a permanent place for himself and his family among the pioneers of sustainable aquaculture in America.

Sunburst Trout Company is located at 128 Raceway Place, Canton, NC, 28716. Phone: 800-673-3051. Web: www.sunbursttrout.com.





THE BEST OF

VIRGINIA FARMS COOKBOOK AND TOUR BOOK

By Cici Williamson. CI Publishing and Menasha Ridge Press, 2003, \$24.95

Many people say if you want to learn about the culture of a place, then study the food. Author Cici Williamson describes her book: "A quilt of writing formats drawn from a wealth of sources was patched together here to showcase the individuals and enterprises who, together, tell the story of almost 400 years of Virginians and their land."

I'd go so far as to say it's a whole lot more than a cookbook and tour book. It's also a history book, a guide to agricultural extension services, an encyclopedia of Virginia agriculture, a directory of Virginia Bed & Breakfast Inns, and a compendium of quotes on Virginia agriculture by noted Virginia politicians. Not to mention that it's an excellent resource and buyer's guide to Virginia farmer's markets, restaurants, farms, wineries, food festivals, museums, gardens, and arboretums.

Did you know that chickens were domesticated around 3000 B.C., but turkeys were not domesticated until 1922 when Virginian Charles Wampler, Sr., came along? There's a fascinating "interview" of Thomas Jefferson as gardener, culled from letters preserved by the Thomas Jefferson Foundation.

Colonial recipes, annotated with suggestions for modern-day preparation, include President James Monroe's Chicken Gumbo and Kenmore Gingerbread. Recipes from Virginian celebrities include Willard Scott's Country Pork Sausage and Edna Lewis's Pan-fried Virginia Spots. Modern recipes aren't left out. Imagine Conicville Ostrich Burgers or Stribling's Crock-pot Apple Butter. Turning these pages, reading these stories, makes me proud to be a Virginian!

—Karen Cathey

A TASTE FOR WAR:

THE CULINARY HISTORY OF THE BLUE AND THE GRAY

By William C. Davis. Stackpole Books, 2003, \$26.95.

Napoleon's observation that "an army marches on its stomach" was no less true in the American Civil War than in earlier wars. Soldiers always complain about the food, says William C. Davis, Professor of History at Virginia Tech, but in this case, there was some justification. Neither army, according to Davis, ever "completely solved the problems of getting adequate food to the armies on time, or in the right place, or in palatable condition, let alone educating millions of strangers to the kitchen in how to cook and eat what they got."

There are stories of hardships from both sides—rotten meat, worm-infested bread, the complete absence of a balanced diet—but Southern soldiers probably suffered more, because of the inability of the South's transportation system to get food where it was needed. "Johnny Reb and Billy Yank went to extraordinary lengths to get food on their plates, and then to get it into their stomachs and keep it there. In the process, they overturned centuries of cultural and gender habit, demonstrated enormous ingenuity in devising things to eat from the raw materials at hand, and endured untold privations that often haunted their health for the rest of their lives."

Davis skillfully and entertainingly weaves together journalistic accounts and observations from soldiers' diaries and letters to document these privations. Nowhere is soldiers' ingenuity more clearly seen than in the collection of recipes at the end of the book. Hardtack, toast soup, planked rat, Louisiana alligator, chinquapin coffee, spruce beer—it's perhaps not a collection that I'll cook from often, but it's inspiring to see how soldiers and civilians did their best to make life as normal as possible in very difficult times.

On Christmas Eve 1863 officers of the Louisiana Tigers camped near Raccoon Ford, Virginia, send a servant out to look for whiskey and eggs for eggnog. He returned just before midnight, and one of the officers records: "The eggs were quickly beaten—the sugar stirred in and then the whiskey added, and we had one of the most delicious nogs that ever mortal man quaffed. Taking a couple of glasses apiece, we retired merrily to bed—to forget the hardships of a soldier's life, and dream of a joyful reunion with the dear absent one far away in Southland."

—Thomas Head

Eat Southern Year-Round: Plant a Garden

BY JEFF SIEGEL

Jim Johnson has been selling seeds from his mail order business on Mississippi's Gulf Coast for more than two decades, and there is still something he doesn't understand. "In parts of the south, we have a nine-month growing season, and we have great soil," says Johnson, who owns www.seedman.com. "If you can't grow vegetables here, you can't grow them anywhere. So why don't more people do it?"

Which is a question to ponder the next time you're standing in the grocery store produce section overpaying for an under ripe tomato. If it's not difficult to grow your own—and Johnson insists it isn't—why not give it a try?

The key, he says, is not to be intimidated. Keep a few simple guidelines in mind:

- You don't need a yard. Yes, it's more efficient (and a plot about 10 feet by 20 feet will provide enough vegetables for two to three people throughout the spring, summer, and fall), but many plants are well-suited for containers, including bell peppers and tomatoes. And a container can just as easily fit on an apartment porch as a backyard patio.

- Plant a few varieties, and plant them at intervals. Johnson suggests squash, such as the yellow crook-necked, tomatoes, peppers, and beans. In addition, greens seem

to appear as if by magic, even after you cut them down. Sow the first batch, wait a week or so, and then sow succeeding batches.

- Choose varieties suited for your area. Not all vegetables will grow in all areas. Some are more drought tolerant or cold tolerant or disease tolerant. This is especially true for tomatoes, which can suffer a host of ailments. But most county extension agents, even in big cities, can supply a list of suitable varieties.

- There are always herbs. If you're still overwhelmed by vegetables, consider herbs. Basil, cilantro, parsley, chives, and sage are prolific, even in Texas' wilting heat and dense clay soil. Best yet, herbs are terrific container plants, don't require much more than watering, and can even survive indoors if they get enough sunlight. One easy, and all too often overlooked, herb is bay. It thrives in containers, and all you have to do to use it is pluck off a leaf.

And a successful garden that produces a regular supply of fresh produce can lead to a serious and very Southern decision. Is canning the solution for all those tomatoes you have to pick just before the first frost?

MUW Students Cook, Clean Up, at SFA Symposium

BY THOMAS HEAD

"I couldn't make this stuff up if I tried," says SFA member Sarah Labensky, director of the Culinary Arts Institute at Mississippi University for Women. She's referring to the ingenuity of a group of twelve juniors and seniors in culinary arts at MUW who traveled from Columbus to Oxford to cook Friday lunch and much of Saturday dinner for the 225 participants in this year's symposium.

The students arrived on Thursday afternoon to commandeer the kitchen of a local Baptist church and set up for their cooking marathon. Sarah Labensky and Ronni Lundy had worked out the menu in advance. Preparation was intense. "The first thing we had to do," Labensky says, "was to make a lot of bacon fat. The kids rendered an entire case of bacon just to get the drippings," indispensable to real Southern cooking.

The centerpiece of the meal was to be a big batch of Bill Best's shuck beans. But anyone who arrived at lunch expecting a pot of beans and cornbread was in for a surprise. A glorious buffet of the best of the Appalachian South surrounded it: cucumbers and onions in vinegar, Kentucky heirloom tomatoes, deviled eggs, potato salad, butter beans and sausage, green tomato casserole, mustard greens with crowder peas, skillet corn, pumpkin grits pudding, cornbread muffins, yeast rolls, apple stack cake, blackberry cobbler, and peanut butter fudge. Of course there was plenty of sweet tea and cold buttermilk too.

While those of us who ate the lunch dozed through the afternoon's presentations, the students were faced with cleaning up. Problems were many. The sinks at the church clogged. The students literally had to bale water with buckets to prevent flooding the kitchen floor. But a potential crisis was averted when one of the students had the bright idea loading the big pots and sheet

pans into a pickup truck and scrubbing them down at a car wash with a power sprayer. Since the bed of the truck had served as a de facto bus tub, they even had to scour the truck bed before putting the clean stuff back in.

Enterprising students like these are a hallmark of the MUW Culinary Arts Institute, a four-year program that began in 1997 and now enrolls about 72 students. The Bachelor of Science degree offers the students a chance to become culinary specialists with minors in entrepreneurship/small business development, food journalism, food art (food styling and photography), and nutrition wellness. "Students know they want to cook when they sign up for our program," Labensky says. "They have a high level of commitment, and that makes them a real pleasure to work with."

The students look forward to the experience of working at the symposium. And their hard work does not go unappreciated. "The kids were great fun," says SFA president Damon Fowler. "They are very sharp and also very grounded. I was very impressed by their calm professionalism and good humor." The SFA tries to give back. In recognition of their efforts we donated \$500 to a recent student research trip to Atlanta, Georgia. What's more, several student internships have grown out of relationships forged at the symposium in Oxford.

MUW students participating in the 2003 symposium were Mel Howard, Millie Welborn, Allison Smith, David Stutts, Shannon Henderson, Opal Peacock, Rashanda Pruitt, Tameka Dallas, Cynthia Hembree, Gabe McCarter, Marie Eckl, Catlin Conner, and Pat Berry. Pictures of the students and their car-wash cleanup can be found on the Culinary Arts Institute's website at <http://www.muw.edu/interdisc/page64.html>.

The University of Mississippi
Southern Foodways Alliance
Center for the Study of
Southern Culture
P.O. Box 1848
University, MS 38677-1848



Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 6

www.southernfoodways.com 662-915-5993 sfamail@olemiss.edu