



## EATING SALMON CROQUETTES WITH WILLIAM FAULKNER

A visit to Rowan Oak  
inspires supper

by John T Edge

I LIVE WITHIN SIX BLOCKS OF ROWAN OAK, William Faulkner's home here in Oxford, Mississippi. He was, arguably, America's greatest twentieth century writer. And his primitive-style Greek Revival house has been restored with such care that you sense the man just ducked out back in search of a pack of smokes and a drink of whiskey. Yet I rarely swing open the door.

Recently, with an out-of-town journalist in tow, I took the tour from Rowan Oak curator Bill Griffith. At the close of our circuit, we paused in the tiny kitchen at the back of the house. There, Griffith played to his audience, reeling off tales of Faulkner and food.

He told us of a Faulkner family cook who refused to clean and cook the doves that the great man shot. She knew, in her heart of hearts, that doves bear departed souls to heaven. We talked about Faulkner's use of food imagery, too, including that passage from *Flags in the Dust*, in which he wrote so evocatively about the smell of fried catfish filtered through a screen door: "FRESH CATFISH TODAY, the board stated in letters of liquified chalk, and through the screen doors beyond it came a smell of refrigerated food—cheese and pickle and such—with a faint overtone of fried grease."

Griffith told us that salmon croquettes were one of Faulkner's favorite dishes. He said that the recipe Faulkner favored was easy to come by. "It's on the can. You can still find the stuff in the grocery store. I think the brand is called 'Pink Salmon.' Something like that."

The next day, I headed to the grocery store, to an aisle I don't often visit. The cans were stashed down low. Sardines in soybean oil. Smoked oysters in vegetable oil. Sockeye salmon. Red salmon. And yes, pink salmon. There was no single can that came blazoned with a recipe, but I did find one with a label that looked like a holdover from Faulkner's era.

That night, in Martha Foose's cookbook *Screen Doors and Sweet Tea*, I found a recipe that recalled Mississippi in the 1950s, when Faulkner was in his salmon croquette-eating prime. I've adapted it a bit, filtering it through memories of my own mother's salmon croquettes, skillet-fried two states over in 1970s Georgia.

### SALMON CROQUETTES

- 1 16-ounce can pink salmon, drained, picked clean of stray bones and skin
- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon lemon pepper
- 1 scant teaspoon garlic salt
- 2 tablespoons minced onion
- 1 teaspoon dill pickle relish
- 10–12 saltine crackers, crumbled
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil

In a medium bowl, combine all but the flour and vegetable oil. Shape into 6 to 8 cakes about 5 inch thick. Refrigerate for an hour.

Heat a large skillet to medium-high. Sprinkle the croquettes with flour. Add the oil and cook the croquettes for 6 to 8 minutes, or until brown, turning them halfway through.

Drain on paper towels and serve with stone-ground grits and braised mustard greens. 🍽️

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John T Edge directs the SFA.

A different version of this piece appeared *Gourmet*.

IMAGE: A Love Note For My Bay Beauty Down Apalachicola Way (detail) by Amy Evans Streeter. Acrylic on wood, 2007.