Gravy

I highly recommend falling in love with a city. It's more faithful and stimulating than a man. And if you pick the right one, you never have to cook again. — Sarah Dunant

NUMBER 20, WINTER 2006 NEWS FROM THE SOUTHERN FOODWAYS ALLIANCE

Calendar Updates

April 8, 2006 Camp Athens: An Edible Education

Join the SFA in Athens, Georgia, for a day of lively talk and great eats as we explore connections between meat-and-three cooking and haute Southern cuisine. More details are forthcoming in February at www.southernfoodways.com. Host chef, Hugh Acheson; among the honorees, Wilson's Soul Food.

May 18-21, 2005 Field Trip to Florida's Forgotten Coast

Join the Southern Foodways Alliance as we travel south to Apalachicola, Florida, a onetime cosmopolitan cotton port, now a fishing village on the brink of change. In keeping with the SFA's programming for 2006, we focus upon the culinary life and legacy of the Gulf South. We will pay homage to the men and women who have long worked the water, tonging for oysters, casting nets for shrimp and fish. John Gorrie, the local doctor who invented the ice machine and was a pioneer in refrigeration and air conditioning, will get his due. We'll taste Tupelo honey, smoked mullet, and casseroles of oysters and spaghetti. Experiential learning and great eating, that's what we promise. Look for your invitation to arrive in February.

From the President

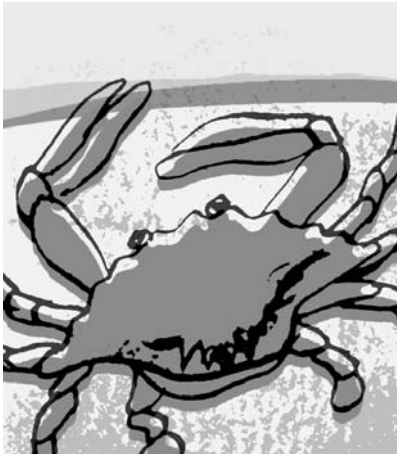
Dear SFA Members,

At the fall symposium, I was reminded once again why I love the Southern Foodways Alliance. I have never seen such extended hugging. Hugging in Greenwood, hugging at Taylor Grocery, hugging at City Grocery, hugging in the Grove. We hug because we feel a profound connection with one another. At the table, at this wonderful gathering, we are all drawn, like so many Shoeless Joes.

We gathered in Oxford to ponder the history of sugar, but also to help one another recover from the devastation of our Gulf coast, our communities and cities. We listened to those who had been there and mourned their losses. We heard them talk of the overwhelming challenge of rebuilding. Their words kindled a cautious optimism that re-creating home was not only possible but essential.

It was a time, as well, for your board to more fully understand what we, as an organization, need to do to build for our collective future. Oral histories, films, day camps, field trips, special events, *Cornbread Nation* (Ronni…*CN3* is wonderful!), websites, symposia – we are vibrant, if we are anything.

Your dedicated board and staff members are excited about the organic evolution of the SFA. And yet, the work we do requires more staff, more funding. Our needs are many. We want to ensure the future of the SFA as a fiscally sound organization, steadfast in our mission of celebrating and documenting the diversity of our region through our foodways.



To achieve this, your board is working hard to create a strategic plan for SFA. With that plan will come objectives and goals and timelines. Know that you will hear more about this by the spring (if not before) and that, as always, the backbone of our organization—its membership—is what makes our gatherings so memorable and meaningful.

Check in often at southernfoodways.com for updates on SFA activities. And keep in mind that, pursuant to your requests, we are adding more SFA events in more cities.

Yours around the table, Elizabeth Sims

Tabasco and SFA Team to Raise NOLA Awareness

The Southern Foodways Alliance is teaming with Tabasco sauce, Louisiana's culinary native son, to raise awareness of the resurgence of the New Orleans food scene and encourage Americans to come back and support one of America's most unique culinary meccas. In a series of special events in select cities across 2006, this team of Southern culinary institutions will showcase some of the most interesting and unusual foods born of Cajun and Creole cultures at open-to-the public tastings and hands-on demonstrations. The calendar will be announced in early spring 2006. Soon more information will be available at www.southernfoodways.com and www.tabasco.com.

Blackberry Farm Update

Early in January, Blackberry Farm hosted the second annual Taste of the South benefit dinner for the SFA. The event raised more than $25,000. Mat Garretson of Garretson Wines (Paso Robles, California by way of Georgia) was the guest winemaker. More than 100 revelers joined proprietor Sam Beall, host chef John Fleer, John Besh (Restaurant August, New Orleans, Louisiana), Sean Brock (Capitol Grill, Nashville, TN), Linton Hopkins (Restaurant Eugene, Atlanta, GA), Edward Lee (610 Magnolia, Louisville, KY), and Maggie Davidson (Blackberry Farm) for a weekend of great modern eats, born of tradition.

GRAVY

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Editor: Thomas Head
thomashead@thomashead.com

Associate Editor: Angie Mosier
food@angiemosier.com

Associate Editor: Timothy C. Davis
timothycdavis1@gmail.com

Director: John T Edge
johnt@olemiss.edu

Brains of the Operation:
Mary Beth Lasseter
sfamail@olemiss.edu

Glover Family Farms Begets Global Family Farms

by Angie Mosier

Skip Glover can trace his family's roots by way of his farm, set on the Anneewakee Creek, near the Chattahoochee River, about forty minutes southwest of Atlanta. Skip's parents were not vocational farmers, yet they were serious about kitchen gardening. His love of Southern food was born, not only on the family farm, but in the surrounding community:

"When I think of the Southern food that is stamped upon my memory, it was not only the food that we grew and cooked here, but my experiences at Houseworth's Boarding House in Douglasville, Georgia. Mrs. Houseworth and her widowed daughter ran this boarding house. And talk about Southern cooks…they had a kitchen garden, used local meats. I, as a kid, sold them blackberries at fifty cents a gallon to use in their blackberry cobblers…

"A reasonable cross-section of, at least at that time, the Caucasian population of Douglasville would be gathered there for lunches. During court week the judges would be there, the visiting attorneys would be there. Along side them would be the mill workers that would actually be living inside the boarding house, and there were always, once or twice a year, the Georgia Power linemen that would come through. They were these big burly guys who could eat an enormous amount of food, and they were all full of jokes… The local doctors would eat there, and to grow up eating there often was a many-faceted education for me."

When Skip was still in college, his father read the Atlanta *Constitution's* serialization of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. The family swore off pesticides and herbicides. "Organic methods were snickered at in the South in the 1950s and 1960s," recalls Skip. "Eventually he discontinued the use of fertilizers too."

Skip went on to earn a master's degree in community development. In time, along with his wife and children, he moved to Western Australia. For seven years, he developed social programs for Aboriginal communities. While he helped the indigenous people learn farming practices, the Glovers worked their kitchen garden, growing black-eyed peas, corn, and okra.

Upon his return to the states, Skip and his wife Cookie never really intended to farm full time. But an interest in organic farming methods led Skip to be an active member in the Georgia Organic Growers Association. "We had little conferences that only drew about 40 or 50 people back then," says Skip. "My involvement grew to board membership and even presidency at one time. Georgia Organics (as it is now known) hosts conferences that now draw three or four hundred people and are quite well known nationally."

Glover Family Farms has been involved in the start-ups of many green markets around the metro Atlanta area as well as outlying areas and continues to be an example of how sustainability and organic practices can become one of the most viable ways to run a small farm:

"When my in-house labor, meaning my children, left home to start their own families, I realized that I needed to figure out how to do something to help keep this land growing without Cookie and me killing ourselves. While I have always been more interested in giving away food as opposed to selling it, I began getting involved in some of the immigrant farm programs that were blossoming. We started with a Southeast Asian immigrant farm project, and now, through Heifer International and a grant from the Kellogg Foundation, the farm is used for the National Immigrant Farming Initiative.

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Mary Land, Louisiana Cookery

Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005. Paperback, $20.

"The five requisite elements in Louisiana cookery, Mary Land contends in her classic 1954 book, are "the iron pot, the roux, stock, herbs, and alcoholic liquids." It is the directness and simplicity of such observations that give Mary Land's writing its authority and her recipes their usefulness. Mary Land was a poet, a novelist, a journalist, and an outdoorsman. She realizes that any area's cooking exists at the intersection of culture—she recognizes the contribution of French, Spanish, Anglo-Saxon, Native American, and African-American cultures to the cooking—and necessity—what the Native peoples and early settlers found and could raise in the northern hills and southern bayous.

The result is a book that is informative about the foodways of 50 years ago—few of us these days have sufficient access to game to makes recipes for muskrat casserole or ragout of bear or squirrel-head pot pie more than a curiosity. But other of the recipes sound very modern. Our age was not the first to discover that spoonbill catfish had roe that could be served as caviar. It's still a useful book for the contemporary Southern kitchen. Cornbread, biscuits, hushpuppies, fried catfish or bream, chicken and dumplings, fried green tomatoes. The chapter on beverages is particularly interesting, not just a useful collection of cocktail recipes but a compendium of recipes for domestically produced ratafias and cordials.

Mary Land begins *Louisiana Cookery* with a quotation from Harnett Kane, who points out in Louisiana Hayride, "Modern Louisiana is divided, as was the mother country, into three pasts: the South, the North, and The City—New Orleans." Each has its own language, its own culture, and its own cooking. Mary Land was born in northwest Louisiana, and one of the delights of this book for me, who grew up in that part of the world, is to see the cooking of North Louisiana treated with equal respect to that of its flashier cousins to the south.

The University Press of Mississippi is to be congratulated for bringing this classic book back to print. My only regret is that for whatever reasons, the editors found it necessary to omit most of the original edition's charming etchings and photographs.

—Thomas Head

Mama Dip's Family Cookbook

by Mildred Council
Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005, $24.95.

Don't buy Mildred Council's handsome *Mama Dip's Family Cookbook* looking for precise, to-a-grain-of-salt instruction on how to recreate her famed Southern delicacies. The owner of Chapel Hill, NC's Mama Dips hasn't use for such truck.

A lifelong proponent of "dump cooking" – a method wherein no recipes or measurements are used, in favor of cooking "by taste and hand" – Council will tell you, right up front: the real secret to good cooking is great ingredients, preferably bought nearby at a farmer's market, farm, or roadside stand. "Good food is fresh food," she says.

Now 76, Council's star has risen in culinary circles over the last 10 years, with appearances on the Food Network and *Good Morning America* under her belt. *New York Times* food writer Craig Claiborne and pro basketball legend Michael Jordan have famously sung her praises. You'd think she might retire, might hang up the 'ol apron. You'd be wrong. She still helps stir a pot, as do some 15 children and grandchildren.

Council's absorbing introduction is the real reason to buy this book. A naked reminiscence, it reminds you that there are stories behind our food, stories that are equally as nourishing as the stuff itself. A visit to Mama Dip's (try the fried green tomatoes) is as instructive as it is tasty. This book allows you to take a little bit of that experience home with you, and the chance to cook up your very own version of her famous catfish gumbo, chicken and dumplings, and smothered pork chops, to name but a few fan favorites.

Just remember to rely on those two most important tools a cook can bring to the food he or she prepares: taste and touch. If that fails, just remember to buy the freshest ingredients you can find. At least you'll help the local economy.

—Timothy C. Davis

Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South

by Marcie Cohen Ferris
Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005. $29.95.

SFA members got a preview of Marcie Ferris' new book at the barbecue symposium in 2003 when she gave a delightful lecture about the barbecue traditions of Jewish Memphis. The dilemma of "how to respect Jewish dietary laws in a region that consumed not just barbecue but bacon, ham, lard, head meat, chitterlings, pig feet, salt pork, fatback, side meat, white meat, potlikker, and pig ears," was a challenge that eventually led to the creation of the world's largest kosher barbecue contest, not as big as Memphis in May but equally important to the character of the city.

Food, Ferris observes, may be considered "a barometer, a measuring device that determined how southern Jews acculturated while also retaining their own heritage." Southern Jews established their ethnic identity by either accepting or rejecting traditional southern foods and traditional Jewish foods. She accords equal respect to those who chose to eat traditional southern foods and those, who with great difficulty, chose to keep the laws of kashrut.

As she explores Jewish life in Charleston, Savannah, New Orleans, Natchez, Memphis, and Atlanta, she is particularly attentive to race relations in the kitchen, which became what she calls a "free zone," where Jewish women and their African American help bonded as the exchanged recipes. African American women often learned to prepare traditional Jewish dishes better than their employers.

Matzoh Ball Gumbo is a scholarly book that approaches an ideal of what scholarly writing should be—thorough, original, entertaining, engaging—and it has recipes, too, more than 30 of them, illustrating the convergence of traditional recipes and regional ingredients.

– Thomas Head

'Glover Family' continued from page 2

They have funded six of these farm projects throughout the U.S., and our farm is one of them."

This particular project includes farmers from Latin America, Southeast Asia, and a smaller group of immigrants from Eastern Europe. Skip continues, "Many of these folks have farming backgrounds and have a real feel for basic small farm practices, and so many of them want to get back into it. These farmers get to choose how they want to farm—either by group or by family. For instance, right now we have 'Guatemalan patch 1' and 'Guatemalan patch 2.' There are also family plots, and we incorporate certain parts of the farm for all to use cooperatively. The chickens are a group effort because they all need to be together. The same goes for the greenhouses and for row crops like corn because it doesn't make sense to plant just two rows of corn here and there. They share the food for personal use, and if they market it, they split the income. They are eating the food and selling it too."

Glover Family Farms is satisfying needs of sustenance and community. Skip and Cookie would like their farm to be here for generations. They believe that sustainable operation is the only way to accomplish that. By operating a working farm that functions as an educational tool, the Glovers are growing a community, populated by like-minded folks from very different backgrounds. Skip would say that differently. He would tell you that it's all about eating great tomatoes and farm eggs for a long, long time.

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

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