

ARKANSAUCE

The Journal of Arkansas Foodways

Issue 4, 2014



Young boy uprooting a large onion, Wilson, Mississippi County, Arkansas, 1939.

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On the Cover: Young boy uprooting a large onion, Wilson, Mississippi County, Arkansas, 1939. Photograph by Jack Pryor. Courtesy: Arkansas Giant Collection, Image 4037, Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

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Welcome to *Arkansauce* 2014!

By Timothy G. Nutt

Special Collections Department Head

Welcome to another edition of *Arkansauce*.

For this issue, we are fortunate to have Kat Robinson as guest editor. Kat has a stellar reputation as a food writer and has traveled around Arkansas documenting our unique food heritage, some of which is presented in this issue of *Arkansauce*. I know you will enjoy learning about the origin of the Delta tamale as much as I did. That article



Timothy G. Nutt, photograph by Russell Cothren.

caused me to think about the numerous settlements of ethnic colonies established around the state from the 1870s to the 1920s, and, especially, how those immigrants brought their foodways to Arkansas.

There were two immigrant colonies established in Perry County: Italian and German. Being of German descent, I always expected to eat German food growing up, but my family never did. Instead, my small community of German Catholics would come together and eat spaghetti. It wasn't bad spaghetti—in fact it was quite good—but it did not make any sense, especially considering there was an Italian settlement about 10 miles away. I believed as a child that since the Germans of Perry County made spaghetti, the Italians of Perry County should make sauerkraut, but that was not the case. It was all very confusing to a 10-year-old boy who thought too much. There is a wonderful dissertation written by Diane Tebbetts on the foodways of the German and Italians of Perry County. I highly recommend it.

Kat gathered “foodies” to write on other topics just as interesting, including one on the Hinderliter Grog Shop on the grounds of the Historic Arkansas Museum. There are also articles on hog killing, the ubiquitous cast iron skillet, and even one on the tomato in Arkansas history. Hopefully, you won't be disappointed.

Although this journal is an annual, we receive comments on and requests for it throughout the year.

It is gratifying to learn how much people across the country enjoy reading *Arkansauce* and how their appetite for it is insatiable, so to speak. *Arkansauce* will remain free to subscribers, but donations to Special Collections to help offset the design, printing, and mailing costs are welcome.

As usual, before this issue is even finished we have already started planning the next issue (our fifth!). So, if you have ideas please contact me. I always enjoy hearing from you.

—Tim Nutt

Call for Menu Donations

As a part of its foodways initiative, Special Collections is seeking to build a collection of Arkansas menus. While we are especially seeking older menus, recent ones are welcome too. We are looking for:

- Restaurant menus
- Menus for special events
- Menus for family meals, such as descriptions of meals in handwritten letters

If you wish to donate a menu, please mail it to or contact Timothy G. Nutt, Department Head, University of Arkansas Libraries, Special Collections Department, 365 N. McIlroy Avenue, Fayetteville, AR 72701, phone: 479-575-8443, e-mail: timn@uark.edu.



From Railroads to Yeast Rolls: How Transportation Affected Arkansas Foodways

By Kat Robinson

Arkansas, for being the smallest state west of the Mississippi, has a diverse culinary culture that is unheralded and distinct from the rest of the United States. A patchwork of native foodstuffs, meshed with the cooking traditions of dozens of cultures, has helped shape the state's tastes and preferences; and, the key to it all lies in how we got here—transportation.

The state's native foods range from nuts, gourds, squash and beans, and a plethora of fish and wildlife. Corn was first brought here by migrating tribes about one thousand years ago. Yet the staple grain the state is most identified with (and the one we produce more of than any other state)—rice—was only entered into commercial production two centuries ago.

Boats brought immigrants up the Mississippi and Arkansas, White and Black and Cache rivers to settle here. Horses drew others across the plains and through the swamplands of the Delta and through the passes of the Ouachita and Ozark mountains. Railroads were built, and they delivered whole populations to new verdant, receptive land to farm and grow communities.

Everything changed, though, with three twentieth century inventions. First, the car drew people across the land on an individual basis, making rapid transit (even at early speeds of 20 miles an hour) available to anyone heading almost anywhere. The transportation of information changed with the explosion of radio and television—and today, in the twenty-first century, our



Kat Robinson

food ideas are transported by the internet in the blink of an eye.

The twentieth century really did change everything about how our foodways progressed here in Arkansas—bringing in new products and ideas, sure, but also bringing first a diner culture and then a dependency on fast food that marked the changing methods of feeding ourselves in the century's last four decades. What chefs today struggle with when attempting to sort out an Arkansas cuisine is sorting through the near-obliteration of many of our traditions thanks to the ease and simplicity of ordering at a window, counter or table rather than pulling out a pot to cook.

Fortunately, the journal *Arkansauce* is here. This journal, now in its fourth iteration, aims to preserve these foodways and to seed the inspiration of others to preserve these ideals while their original traditions and the cooks that continue to practice them still exist.

Within you will find tales of family shared by Debbie Arnold. Mary Twedt elaborates on dabbling in salsa, while Cindy Grisham picks up on the tradition of using every bit of the hog “but the squeal.” Michael Dougan covers tomatoes, while Christie Morgan Ison looks back at the history of Arkansas's oldest known restaurant and Eric Francis puts a shine on the heritage of cast iron.

We'll look back at the history of the state's oldest bakery, the Magnolia Bake Shop—and the history of the Arkansas Delta Tamale preserved today in Helena-West Helena. And we'll look to the future with Michael Roberts and cast a thought on how social media shapes the restaurant landscape today.

There are far more tales to share concerning our unique foodways. I encourage you to share yours and to help record others' before they fade into today's homogenized culinary landscape.

Kat Robinson is a food and travel writer. Her recent publications include Arkansas Pie: A Delicious Slice of the Natural State and Classic Eateries of the Ozarks and Arkansas River Valley. She also serves as Communications Manager in the Tourism Division at Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism.

Hinderliter's Grog-Shop and the Steamboats of the Arkansas Frontier

By Christie Ison

“All the news, all the scandal, all the politics, and all the fun...”¹ Captain John Marryat, a “gentleman adventurer” of the 1830s, so described the raucous taverns dotted along his westward travels, the city centers of frontier life usually established near a river. As weary travelers came off their keelboats and steamboats, they found the tavern, or grog-shop, a place to catch up on gossip, food and a bit of sleep, if boarding was available.

Today, one of these grog-shops still stands on one of the busiest corners of modern downtown Little Rock. The now quiet, white-boarded log house rests, heavy with untold stories, as the oldest standing restaurant in the city on the corner of Third and Cumberland streets.

The building is known as Hinderliter's Grog-Shop and is part of Historic Arkansas Museum, formerly the Arkansas Territorial Restoration. The site is interpreted to visitors as it is thought to have stood in 1833, with several roles in the community: restaurant and boarding for travelers and long-term guests, post office and news center. It even served as the official community meeting place for politics and announcements, causing some of the museum's early preservationists to refer to it as the “territorial capitol.”

As was typical of the period, the establishment's kitchen stands separately due to the frequency of fire, usually started by the petticoats of ladies, often slaves, tending to the cooking. The large brick structure stands just to the north of Jesse Hinderliter's tavern. It was a bit larger than those for the surrounding homes of the period, having not only the task of feed-

ing the owner's family and slaves but also the many guests and the surrounding residents who stopped in for a drink or meal.

The cold brick interior of the kitchen could not be further from our modern restaurant kitchens of stain-less steel, but also harkens back to methods coming back into favor again: open hearth cooking, whole foods, fresh herbs and cast iron. Whole game turned over the generous fire, and large stew pots swung over the heat held by swing-out arms.

Little is known about the menus served at Hinderliter's tavern, but some lowly standards of the time are safe to assume. Early Arkansas explorer Friedrich Gerstäcker, a German author writing his way through the western frontier, noted that “maize bread, coffee and bacon” were the typical elements of “breakfast in this part of the world.” Cornbread and pork most likely made reappearances in the day's remaining meals.

It may be even more interesting to consider how Hinderliter's German heritage affected the meals served at the tavern. There are no records to support the idea, but it is very likely that potatoes, stewed meats, sausages and similar heavy fare prevailed. One can imagine his wife, Sophia, instructing their two slaves on how these dishes were prepared.

More frequent steamboat traffic in the 1830s and 1840s brought more visitors to Hinderliter and similar establishments, also bringing an infusion of foodstuffs from the outside world. Many similar establishments advertised their recent restocking by



Interior view of Hinderliter's Grog-Shop as interpreted at the Historic Arkansas Museum. Photograph by Grav Weldon.

boat of epicurean delights and choice liquors from larger cities, especially New Orleans and Cincinnati.

Tavern meals may have included meats and fresh vegetables from the area “Little Rock Market,” a farmers' market of sorts supplied by area gardeners and butchers. The market also likely featured delicacies brought in by steamboat such as wrapped hams and other meats, pickled fish and oysters, dried fruits, fresh cranberries and apples, loaf sugar and even ketchup.

Today, visitors walk into Jesse Hinderliter's world on a daily basis at Historic Arkansas Museum, meeting costumed actors portraying his wife or another area resident. The stories told there often start with a faraway steamboat and end up right at Hinderliter's table. While he likely did not run the fanciest grog-shop in Little Rock, his work as one of the city's earliest restaurateurs easily fits into today's growing culinary tapestry.

Christie Ison, an independent culinary instructor, blends her passions for cooking and writing in her blog Fancy-PantsFoodie.com. Ison thanks Swannee Bennett, Deputy Director of Historic Arkansas Museum for providing information for this article.

¹ See C. B. Marryat, *A Diary in America: With Remarks on Its Institutions*, Series Two. NY: Colyer, 1839.

The Sad Saga of the Tomato in Arkansas, or, How the Red Gold became Pink Before Expiring

By Michael B. Dougan

In 1893 the United States Supreme Court in the case of *Nix v. Hedden* held that for purposes of taxation, the tomato, a known botanical fruit, was a vegetable. The decision has often been ridiculed, but the unanimous decision reflected real life conditions while symbolically demonstrating one aspect of the complex history of the tomato.

Although the Spanish *conquistadores* brought smallpox and other diseases to Mexico from the Euro-Afro-Asian disease pool, they carried back what in the native Nahuatl language was called the tomatl. This edible “wolf’s peach” not only reached Europe but also went to the Philippines and took root in the Caribbean colonies. In 1753 Linnaeus bestowed upon these small red and yellow fruits closely kin to the potato the Latin name *Solanum lycopersicum*. By that time the plant originally grown for decoration had also begun to be eaten despite its membership in the “deadly” nightshade family. The first published recipes appeared in Spain in 1692, and cultivation spread, notably to Italy and France. The first known French recipe in 1795 was for a sort of tomato paste, and the *pomme d’amour* showed up prominently in the markets. From the English Caribbean colony of Antigua came *A Colonial Plantation Cookbook; The Receipt Book of Harriot Pinckney Horry* (1770), offering a recipe for stewed tomatoes.

Hence, there is every reason to believe that tomatoes were grown and eaten in Arkansas during the

French and Spanish colonial period, even if no recipes have survived. In fact, it would seem that the well-known prejudice against the tomato was New England-centered. The earliest Southern almanacs gave lessons on tomato culture, and seeds provided by commercial growers figured into the newspaper advertisements of territorial Arkansas. The Shakers, a religious group with advanced ideas on dancing, were pioneering seedsmen, and in Little Rock L. and W. R. Gibson regularly advertised “a General Assortment of *Fresh Garden Seed*, put up last fall, at Shakertown, Ky.”

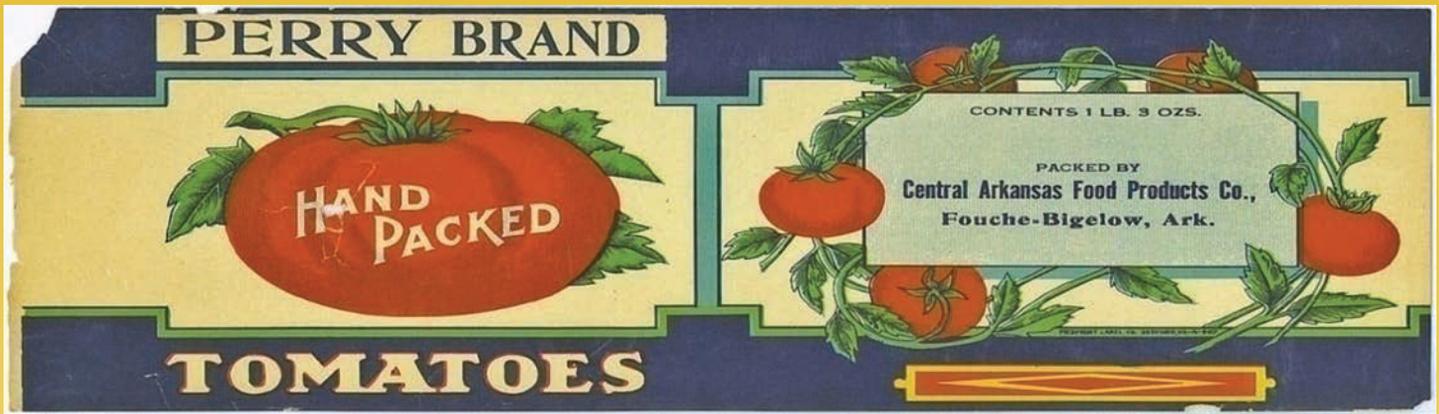
Albert Pike, whose motto at the Little Rock *Arkansas Advocate* was, “Digest things rightly, touching the weal of the Common,” supported the plant editorially. His 1835 endorsement included reprinting highlights of a speech by Dr. John Cook Bennett, Professor of Midwifery and the Diseases of Women, Children, Hygiene and Acclimatement from Willoughby University in Ohio. Bennett, who was more famous for his later involvement with the Mormons, claimed that the tomato was “one of the most powerful deobstruents of the *Materia Medica*.” In addition, it was capable of treating liver disease, arresting “diarrhoea,” resolving indigestion, and worked to prevent Cholera. Persons moving west should eat tomatoes in order to avoid “those violent attacks to which almost all unacclimated persons are liable.”

Dr. Bennett concluded by asserting that “citizens in general should make use of it, either raw, cooked, or

In 1892 J. T. Bunch brought into the Brinkley Argus office what the venerable W. B. Folsom called “one of the largest tomatoes that we ever saw.” It weighed one pound fourteen ounces and came from Ponderosa seed.

in the form of catsup, with the daily food.” Catsup, to use the American spelling, was derived from a pre-tomato Chinese soy sauce which became by the nineteenth century one of the favorite ways to preserve the tomato. Pike made no mention of any prejudice in Arkansas against the tomato but instead endorsed using “the vegetable” to treat “that distressing malady the *Liver Complaint*,” and offered additional medical testimonies: “The ease with which the Tomato is raised places it within the reach of every family, and a few plants in the corner of the garden will not only furnish a cheap and abundant luxury for the table, but may also save a good many visits from the doctor, and thereby considerably whittle down that *monstrum horrendum*, his bill.”

Pike’s advice was surely followed. In June 1860 Clarrisa Dunlap from rural Ouachita County informed her sister in Alabama that she had “all kinds of vegetables I



Perry Brand Tomatoes Label, ca. 1915. The cannery was located in between the towns of Fourche (which is misspelled on the label) and Bigelow in Perry County. Courtesy: Buford Suffridge.

believe [sic] except cucumbers & tomatoes & will soon have them." Apparently she either relied on another person for seeds or planned to get them commercially. She mentioned tomatoes again in 1860 and 1867.

Much can be gleaned from *Des Arc Citizen* editor John C. Morrill who in 1859 was delighted when Thomas B. Phoebus presented him with "four tomatoes, partially grown, which weighed three pounds," the largest weighed one pound three ounces. The seed, Morrill explained, came from California, and the editor, who saved seed, planned "to raise the largest tomatoes in the State, and take the premium at our next County Fair." Across the nation county fairs helped spread food and plant awareness.

Meanwhile the post-Civil War period ushered in the golden age of seedsmen. Companies held contests for new varieties. While seed saving became more scientific, many home growers turned to specific named varieties. Alexander W. Livingston's "Paragon" came out in 1870 and was followed by Peter Henderson's "Ponderosa." In 1892 J. T. Bunch brought into the *Brinkley Argus* office what the venerable W. B. Folsom called "one of the largest tomatoes that we ever saw." It weighed one pound fourteen ounces and came from Ponderosa seed. Bunch secured an affidavit as to its weight and entered it in the seed seller's contest for the largest tomato grown in the United States. As home canning became increasingly

important, tomatoes figured largely because their acidic content made them good candidates for the water boiling method.

The early twentieth century saw an exponential rise in local canning companies. Arkansas was home to eight concerns in 1890, 34 in 1900, and 51 in 1925. In 1911 Ohio packer Frank Van Camp even attempted (unsuccessfully) to buy up the futures market in tomatoes. Packers canned "fresh, whole tomatoes," but catsup figured prominently because cost conscious companies used less than perfect (spoiled and wormy) tomatoes, added large amounts of seasonings to cover the taste deficiency, and topped it off by adding sodium benzoate, a German-discovered preservative, which retarded the inevitable spoilage. Many canners added squash and other fillers. The Pure Food and Drug Act inaugurated an era of federal inspection, and inspectors "will have their eyes on tomato canners," a trade journal in 1919 reported. However, inspection covered only goods that crossed interstate lines. For decades, the tomato became a leading cash crop, the red gold, for farmers especially in the Ozarks. Local "shade-tree" canners continued in operation until strong regulations arrived in the 1950s that were partly the work of large canning companies wanting to eliminate competition.

The universality of tomatoes by the early twentieth century is evident by contrasting the first known Arkansas cookbook, *Chicora's Help to*

Housekeepers (1891) which contained only one recipe for tomatoes, with the *Stamps Presbyterian Cook Book of 1915*, that gave instructions for canning fresh tomatoes, and featured fresh tomatoes baked and stuffed, and used in spaghetti, chow chow, and chili sauces. However, a tomato salad recipe called for using gelatin.

Seaman A. Knapp, a major figure in the creation of the rice industry in Arkansas, also contributed to the twentieth-century tomato explosion when in 1907 he championed rural development by starting Boys' Corn Clubs. And he urged his audiences to engage females: "In the United States the art of cooking is mainly a lost art. There are communities where not to be dyspeptic is to be out of fashion." His 1909 speech in Aiken, South Carolina, prompted Marie Samuella Cromer, a rural schoolteacher, to start up the Tomato Girls Clubs movement. Their song, sung to the tune of "Three Blind Mice," emphasized both agricultural and culture connections:

See how we can. See how we can.
Give us tomatoes and a good
sharp knife—
This is the place to get a good
wife.
Did ever you see such girls in
your life—
As the Tomato Club?

The movement spread across the South and the Mabelvale Tomato Girls Club near Little Rock transitioned into a home demonstration

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Women and girls from a Pulaski County tomato canning club display fresh fruit and preserved items they produced, ca. 1912. Courtesy: Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Mabelvale Home Demonstration Club Records (MC 1640), "Canning Club Work of Emma Archer," Scrapbook, Image 53.

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club following the adoption of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914.

Curiously "lettuce" was among the items to be canned in addition to tomatoes. Presumably today that would be called greens. Only in the twentieth century did fresh uncooked lettuce come into its own, especially in the form of iceberg lettuce, a crisp head variety that might be to lettuce what Twinkies are to baked goods. Shipped on ice from California, it appeared in the 1920s, but it was not until after World War II that the Bacon, Lettuce and Tomato Sandwich became a staple. Arkansas food writer and tubist Richard Allin, who was so particular on his choices of tomatoes and bacon, claimed that only store-bought white bread could be used.

The Great Depression saw the establishment of community canning centers armed with pressure cookers that permitted meat and other low-acid foods safely to be canned. The soups and stews invariably featured tomatoes. So extensive was the cultivation that Monticello (Drew County) held a Tomato Festival that ended in 1941. The previous year had been a disaster, with prices

falling to one-half cent a pound. The festival was revived in 1951 but soon languished, leaving the field open to Warren (Bradley County), whose Pink Tomato Festival began in 1956.

The key man behind the pink tomato was Dr. Joe McFerran, who died in 2011 at age 94. Long a horticulture professor at the University of Arkansas, McFerran was responsible for introducing the Bradley, Arkansas Traveler, and Arkansas Traveler 76. However, the claim is often made that the Arkansas Traveler was an heirloom rather than a hybrid. In 1987 the South Arkansas Vine Ripe Pink Tomato became the official state "fruit and vegetable," but commercial production of tomatoes fell from 11,820 tons in 1989 to 4,285 in 2005. These developments came at the same time when commercial growers shifted to the Mountain Red varieties that shipped better. Mechanical tomato harvesters, first introduced in California, spelled the end of picking fresh, ripe and tasty fruit. Thus the official state fruit stands in similar relation to the Arkansas Black apple: something that few have heard about and even fewer have ever tasted.

During the last phases of rural

self-sufficiency, the Home Demonstration agents supported the Live at Home movement that emphasized canning and home gardens. But after 1960 country people chose instead to shop for their food at supermarkets. In 2005 the Extension Service out of Fayetteville discontinued posting canning information on the Internet.

The removal proved to be short-lived. A few young people came to recognize that the grocery store tomato bordered on the inedible, and farmers' markets and the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) movement even turned to older "heirloom" varieties. The post-2008 garden revival offered real food options, both to home gardeners and to small growers serving farmers' markets. Yet when the federal government, alarmed by an explosion of childhood obesity, attempted to alter cafeteria offerings by mandating fresh fruits and vegetables, the children rejected the offerings. The triumph of industry-produced products as well as supermarket tasteless imitations of fruits and vegetables makes it likely that the rich flavors of the historic tomatoes will survive only on the margins of Arkansas life.

But, those of us on these margins realize that the tomato provides that scintilla of pleasurable taste that can elevate an ordinary dish.

And how best to eat real tomatoes? Keep them at room temperature, slice them or quarter them, use salt and pepper sparingly, if at all. The more adventurous may substitute peanut butter for lettuce and bacon, but use homemade white bread for best results.

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Michael B. Dougan is emeritus professor of history at Arkansas State University. An avid gardener since youth, Dougan often writes on horticultural topics. He and his wife, Carol, live in Jonesboro.

Farmers' Market Tomato Salsa

Mary Twedt

4 cups chopped fresh firm ripe tomatoes
1 cup chopped onion
(either sweet yellow, Vidalia,
or ½ cup purple onion, if it's real strong)
½-¾ cup chopped fresh cilantro
1-2 chopped fresh jalapeños,
chopped fine with no seeds
Salt & pepper to taste

Blend and chill. Eat with tortilla chips

Options : You can easily add chopped green, red, or yellow peppers

Over the last eleven years I have done a show called "Arkansas Cooks" on Little Rock public radio station KUAR, focusing on eclectic cooks all over the state. The show has been an exciting outlet for me, and I have discovered that the way folks in Arkansas cook differs from chef to chef, yet is similar because of one thing: Arkansans, and most likely many Southern cooks, cook from their heart. From doing this show, I also discovered that many of my guests learned how to cook from their mothers, as was my experience. That, perhaps, is where the heart comes in, by steadily leaning on our hearts when we cook, the way our mothers showed us.

I must admit that my mother was not an original Southern cook. She was born in Iowa and did indeed learn to cook from her mother, and she from her mother, but she adapted and learned how to make not only cornbread stuffing but things from farther south, like salsa and Mexican dishes that taste real good! My husband often says of my mother "Your mom would have been a great cook, if she was born in the South." That is a direct quote from husband Paul about my Iowa born mother. You see my husband of nineteen years loves my mother's cooking, and he has this fantasy that if she had been "reared" in the South, she could have been so much better!

My Southern advantage came in when my family moved to Little Rock when I was only nine years old. I had already been cooking with my mom since I was four or five. I started early. However, my real love for cooking came around the time we moved to the South. I vividly remember the transition from bland northern "Yankee" food to the extreme flavors that lit up my palate in the South. The best story is the first time my family ate out after moving to Arkansas, at Browning's Mexican Restaurant in the Heights neighborhood of Little Rock. The only person in our family of six who had ever eaten spicy food of any kind was my father Harlan. He had been stationed in Texas in the military. The rest of us had never had anything spicier than salt and pepper on our baked potatoes. My three brothers and I were on fire after my father dared us to take a bite of salsa. We must have gone through three pitchers of water while my mother scolded my dad for the dare. I remember my mouth hanging open as I watched people asking for seconds of that "fire in a salsa bowl."

Forty-plus years later, my whole family eats spicy food just like everyone else, except my mom who never got used to it. Now every summer when the tomatoes get ripe and the cilantro is still fresh, I make my first batch of Farmers' Market Tomato Salsa, and I make her one with no jalapeños. So for all you Arkansas Cooks out there, life is too short to eat bad food, so eat it with great people, people you love; it will taste so much better!

Mary Twedt has hosted KUAR's "Arkansas Cooks," a weekly radio program, for over a decade. She is also a contributor to the Twedt Family Cookbook.

The Black Heart of the Kitchen

By Eric Francis

When I left home after college, I took with me my mother's love and her cast iron skillet.

Unpretentious, utilitarian, and a lustrous black that comes from decades of proper seasoning, it was a staple of her kitchen and has become the bedrock of mine. There's almost nothing I won't cook within its 10-inch span (though for big crowds, I'll haul out its 14-inch big brother I got a few years back), and there's no cooking surface that is beyond it: the stovetop, the oven, the grill, an open fire.

While Arkansas's native peoples managed for untold millennia without cast iron cookware, I'll wager that ironmongery has been used to whip up vittles in Arkansas ever since the first settlers crossed the Big Muddy and followed our namesake river or some other waterway up into the state's interior. Tough and versatile, it is exactly what you needed to survive on the frontier.

As a matter of fact, the cast iron Dutch oven is even the state's historic cooking vessel. One of the people behind that designation is John G. Ragsdale, Jr., a former El Doradoan now living in Texas, who back in the 1970s published *Dutch Oven Cooking*, now in its fourth edition with more than 350,000 copies sold. But Ragsdale wasn't a chef looking to gain fame and glory; rather, he was an oilman trying to ensure he got a good meal on certain weekends.

"Back about 50 years ago, I inherited a Boy Scout troop and the boys had not been trained well in cooking," said Ragsdale, who spent his career as an engineer with Lion Oil and as a private consultant. "A couple of us decided to start on an adventure to instruct them in cooking."



John G. and De De Ragsdale at a Dutch Oven Cooking demonstration, Ozark Folk Center in Mountain View, 1988. Courtesy: John G. and De De Ragsdale Papers (MC 1459), Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries.

The cooking vessel of choice was the cast iron Dutch oven—wide, tall-sided, three-legged, with a lid sporting a tall lip to hold coals on top. He selected it because it had an advantage over all the other campfire kitchen standards.

"You can bake in them," Ragsdale explained. "You can cook in skillets, and we've cooked in gallon tin cans on canoe trips when we were in one canoe and didn't want to carry a lot of equipment. But Dutch ovens were something we could bake in—bis-

cuits, cakes, cookies, cobblers, whatever you wanted to adapt them to."

So month after month, Ragsdale invented the recipes that his Scouts would use on their campouts. He didn't have any prior experience to speak of, so there was a lot of experimentation.

"Sometimes in our troop, if we had four or five patrols we'd give each other the same recipe and see how it turned out," he said, "or give each one different recipes and they would compare them among themselves."

Eventually he decided to put together a list of the recipes and some instructions for using the Dutch oven into a book. *Dutch Oven Cooking* premiered in 1973 and marked its

40th anniversary this year. He followed it up in 2004 with *Dutch Ovens Chronicled: Their Use in the United States*.

It has been a couple of years since Ragsdale has exercised his own Dutch oven skills. He keeps a few around, although most of what he collected over the years—dozens and dozens, dating back as far as about 1790—were donated to the Historic Arkansas Museum in Little Rock and the Plantation Agriculture Museum in Scott. Although he does not have

a favorite recipe, he can tell you what he's cooked more of in a Dutch oven than anything else: biscuits, especially when he was feeding crowds of visitors at the Ozark Folk Center or other museums.

I'll wager that ironmongery has been used to whip up vittles in Arkansas ever since the first settlers crossed the Big Muddy and followed our namesake river or some other waterway up into the state's interior. Tough and versatile, it is exactly what you needed to survive on the frontier.

"We would have a Dutch oven heated and I could usually, in a 12-inch oven, get 22 to 24 biscuits," Ragsdale said. "I have a small biscuit cutter, and a philosophy for that, too: If you cut them smaller, you can give samples to more people. Often it was never enough."

Many of those biscuits were consumed by visitors to the Historic Arkansas Museum, whose deputy director Swannee Bennett says their collection of cast iron cookware is unrivaled in the state. But none of it was produced here; Arkansas didn't have a foundry turning out skillets and such, but the state's mercantile

outfits were eager to fill the void for what was known as "castings" and sold by the pound, he said.

"Go to the University of Arkansas Special Collections and get into the microfilm of old newspapers and you'll see 'just received 1,200 pounds of castings' or '5,000 pounds of castings'—that meant cast iron ware," said Bennett. "The names we use today are not the names they used then."

For example, the term Dutch oven didn't come into use until the late nineteenth century, but you could buy a spider (a skillet with legs) along with saucepans, kettles, pots, and the like.

I asked Bennett if the museum had ever knocked the dust off a piece of its old iron cookery, re-seasoned it, and put it to the use for which it was intended. Maybe it was my imagination, but it almost sounded like he was frowning when he responded, "We buy reproductions to use for our demonstrations."

Perhaps I was taking the term "living history" a little too seriously. But that's beside the point.

Cast iron wasn't just limited to cookware, of course. The Rogers Historical Museum has all manner of cast ironmongery from the state's history back to the late 1800s.

"We do have several pieces: a laundry boiler, a lard press, pots and pans, a griddle, an egg beater, Dutch ovens," said Jami Roskamp, the museum's curator of collections. "We have a pressure cooker from the 1920s to '30s."

The beauty of cast iron, Roskamp pointed out, was that it was fairly easy to make something with it—just pour molten iron into a mold—and the resultant object stored and released heat in a consistent manner, a boon to cooking without thermo-

stats. Then there was cast iron's parlor trick: seasoning.

"To make a skillet non-stick, you had to season it so when you cooked, your food wasn't going to stick to your pan," said Roskamp.

Okay... but has she tried it with anything in the museum's collection? The answer, delivered with a disbelieving laugh, is no.

"You could," she said cautiously, as though not wanting to give anybody ideas. "I would definitely want to thoroughly clean it and season it again. But there are people today who still collect antique cast iron skillets and things because they believe they are far superior to what is produced today."

The advent of the thermostatically controlled electric oven in the 1850s was the writing on the wall for the Dutch oven, Ragsdale said, but other cast iron cookware has retained its place in our kitchens. And while you can get yours ready-seasoned from the factory or coated with slick, colorful enamel, odds are someone in your family still has the old standby sitting out there on the stove: a heavy black skillet, old as the hills, ready to take on all comers.

Eric Francis is an award winning journalist and editor with over 20 years of experience in Arkansas.

Nineteenth Century Culinary Traditions Revived at Williams Tavern Restaurant

By Kat Robinson

When did restaurants start popping up in Arkansas?

For that matter, what qualifies as a restaurant? The term “restaurant” was not used much in our country, let alone Arkansas, before the twentieth century. The word was allegedly created by a soup vendor in France who sold “restoratives,” which taken to one extreme equates restaurant with soup, no?

That Frenchman was known as Monsieur Boulanger, and in 1765 he had a sign outside his shop in Paris that read, “VENITE AD ME VOS QUI STOMACHO LABORATIS ET EGO RESTAURABO VOS” (Come to me, all who labour in the stomach, and I will restore you). He gets credit for the word, but the actual concept of a place where you exchange money for food is quite ancient with both the Chinese and the Romans having some variation.

Here in Arkansas, finding a restaurant still standing from the nineteenth century presents a challenge—especially one still in operation. The oldest such structure still in existence stands in Little Rock, the city’s oldest building. That would be the Hinderliter Grog Shop, which is part of the fine collection of territorial buildings at the Historic Arkansas Museum (see Christie Ison’s piece in



Williams Tavern Restaurant in Historic Washington State Park. Photograph by Kat Robinson.

this issue). The state’s oldest general store is the Oark General Store, way out in the little Oark community in Franklin County, near the Mulberry River and far away from just about everything else. It dates back to 1890, though the restaurant housed there has come and gone through the years.

But the oldest restaurant operating today? That honor likely goes to Williams Tavern Restaurant in the Southwest Arkansas town of Washington. The restaurant part was added in 1986 when the building was relocated and opened for lunch on the grounds of Old Washington, now Historic Washington State Park. The park consists of a whole town of nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings about ten miles north of Hope.

Williams Tavern was originally located in Marlbrook, approximately seven miles to the northeast of Washington, in 1832, and built by a man named John Williams. Williams

lived there until his death in 1869.

Williams’ place was not just his home—it served as a stopping-in point for the community and for travelers. It was a post office, stagecoach shop, and tavern. His “stand” off the Southwest Trail was considered one of the best known between Memphis and the Red River. Wayfarers would arrive, purchase corn and hay to feed their horses and then have a bite to eat themselves. Many would camp around the inn before heading out the next morning.

Old Washington State Park was created in 1973. Structures from the area were moved into place in the empty spots over the years and with a financial donation in 1985 from the Pioneer Washington Restoration Foundation, Williams Tavern found a home. It was restored and opened in 1986 for breakfast.

Today Williams Tavern is open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. for lunch. There is

often a buffet, or you can order off the menu things such as a hamburger, ham steak, hamburger steak, chicken fried steak and such— served up with so many possibilities of sides ranging from green beans and corn and fried okra to squash, zucchini and black-eyed pea salad. It is also known for its desserts, such as apple cobbler, cream-filled chocolate Earthquake Cake and even cushaw pie. In the Yuletide season, the restaurant still offers a traditional holiday dinner of turkey, ham and all the fixings on a buffet all month long.

I mentioned cushaw pie, but maybe you have not heard of it. I do not think that I have had it since I was a child—but it is a true south Arkansas delicacy. In the summer months it often graces the specials' board at Williams Tavern. The cushaw in question is a goose-necked squash that's green with white or yellow stripes.

Is it an authentic experience? That depends on what you're calling authentic. If you're interested in eating food popular in southwest Arkansas, it's spot-on. If you are looking for the exact items served at Williams Tavern in the 1830s, then not so much. Then again, we do not really have a complete record of what was available at the tavern back then. And chances are, many of the staples available today just were not around back then.

But the Williams Tavern experience is wonderful. The wait staff dress in country outfits—white shirts, black skirts and aprons. A lot of those aprons are made by waitress Dusty Chambers' mom. She says her mom can make any apron from scratch at the drop of a hat. After seeing so many different aprons attributed to her mom, I believe that statement.



The chicken fried steak is just one of the items on the menu at the restaurant. Photograph by Kat Robinson.

Cushaw Pie

2 cups prepared cushaw squash puree
 2/3 cup brown sugar
 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
 1/2 teaspoon salt
 3 large eggs
 1 teaspoon vanilla
 12 ounces evaporated milk
 Single pie crust

Combine cushaw squash puree, brown sugar, cinnamon, ginger, and salt in a medium-size mixing bowl. Add eggs and vanilla then beat lightly with a whisk. Stir in evaporated milk. Mix well. Pour into a pastry-lined pie plate. Bake on the lowest oven rack at 375-degrees for 50-60 minutes (until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean). Chill before serving.



Slice of Cushaw Pie. Photograph by Kat Robinson.

The Magnolia Bake Shop, the State's Oldest Bakery, Looks Back

By Kat Robinson

The oldest bakery in Arkansas may very well be the Magnolia Bake Shop in Magnolia, Arkansas. Opened in the late 1920s, it has been in the Stroope family for 86 years.

I had a chance to speak with Stephen Stroope, who owns the bakery with his wife Betsy. First thing I asked him was how long the bakery had been around. "Since water," he chuckled, and dove right into the story behind the place.

The bakery was started in 1928 by Carmie Schobel Stroope, who had been a dairy worker for several years. Stroope ran it for four years before selling it in 1932 to his wife's two sisters, May and Hassie Beaty. The sisters owned the bakery for decades, and were known for their great baked goods.

Stroope's son Joe Franklin Stroope was an adventuresome young man who took to hitchhiking in his youth. He traveled to a lot of different places and discovered the world in this fashion. Back in 1941 he was hitchhiking and a man pulled up in the finest car he ever did see and offered him a ride to Camden. Joe accepted that ride—and when he got in he saw a .45 caliber gun and a pint of whiskey on the front seat. It turned out the man he accepted that ride from was none other than Sid McMath who a few short years later would become governor of Arkansas.

Sometime in the late 1930s or early 1940s, Joe traveled to Darien, Illinois, and enrolled in the Wilton Cake Decorating School. Later on, he headed out to California, where he got to hear the big bands play. He took along his high school sweetheart, Martha, and there they started a family and two bakeries.



Interior of the Magnolia Bake Shop. Photograph by Grav Weldon.

In 1961, Joe came back from California, bought the bakery from the two sisters and resettled his family there. His three sons also worked there, the youngest of them being Stephen, who was ten at the time.

"The square was gravel back then," he told me. "I remember coming in 1961. I walked in and the doors were black and white—two double doors. There were single light bulbs on the ceiling. The Cokes had ice on them. They didn't use ice on top of the case to keep it cool, but they weren't far from it. Hassie and May Beaty made a good living. They weren't rich, but they had a lot of money and it was amazing."

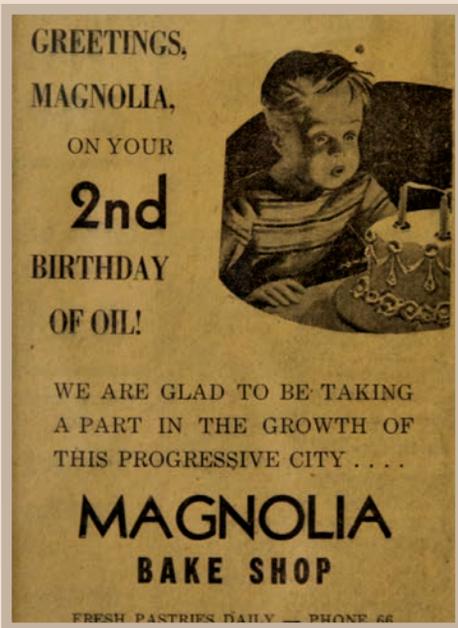
The bakery by that point was well established, and it had a following. It would turn out cakes, particularly striped cake and whipped cream coconut cakes, fruit bars, iced butter cookies, German chocolate cake and more, day after day.

"I'm very lucky, and old enough to realize it," Stephen told me. "It's

lucky to be born into a business like that."

Joe Franklin Stroope kept up the bakery and made a good name for it and for his family in Magnolia. He never turned away a customer; black or white, he served everyone. "He taught us how to treat people right, treat your help right too, and boy I see where he was going with that.

"My mamma said she was his second love, and that the bakery was his first. She'd say 'go put your baby to bed' and he'd go piddle and come back home and everybody was happy."



Advertisement sponsored by the Magnolia Bake Shop honoring the city of Magnolia on the second anniversary of the discovery of oil, ca. 1940. Courtesy: Stroope Family.

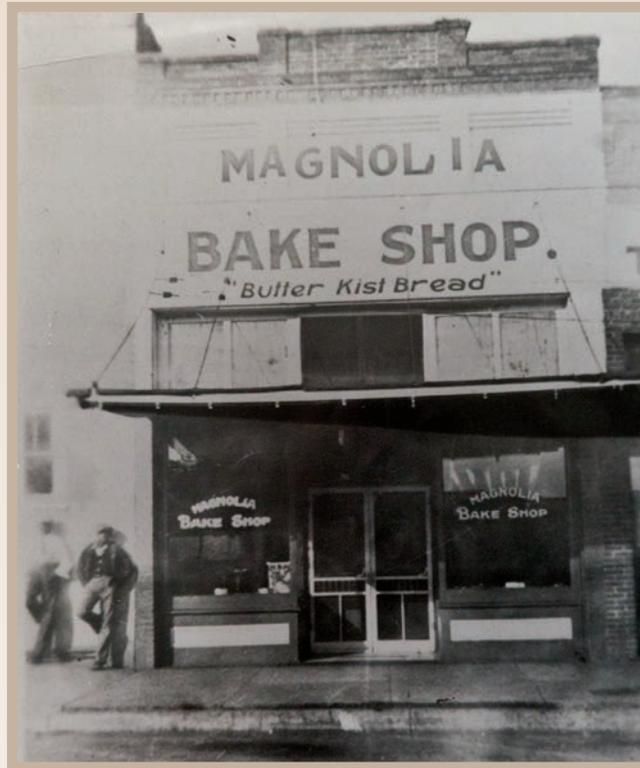
And that's the whole reason he did so well, that's true."

He grew up during the Great Depression, and he was only broke once in his life. Stephen says Joe made a promise to himself never to be broke again. He kept the bakery open seven days a week, every day of the year, getting up in the early hours of morning and going in day after day.

"My mamma said she was his second love, and that the bakery was his first. She'd say 'go put your baby to bed' and he'd go piddle and come back home and everybody was happy."

Joe's brother, C.S. Stroope, was also in the business. He ran Stroope's Pastry Shoppe in Camden and passed it along to his son; it closed just a few years ago. The family also had a shop in El Dorado started for Stephen's son, but after the young man died that shop was closed.

The Magnolia Bake Shop did things by keeping them pretty much the same. "It's hard to change something if it's working," Stephen stated. Joe tried to introduce Danish cookies at one point. They didn't sell until one of the local ladies bought a



Exterior view of the Bake Shop, ca. 1935. Courtesy: Stroope Family.

bunch and served them at a party. Then they took off.

Joe sold the bakery to his three sons in 1984. He passed away in 2007. Stephen's two older brothers have retired, and for the last couple of years it's just been Stephen and Betsy.

"We have pretty much everything same as it was then," Stephen said. "A lot of our clientele has died off, but now we got new ones. We have customers from Dallas and Shreveport. During the Christmas holidays we can't keep up with it—you can't make it quick, not enough room to store, but that's when we make our money so we do what we can do."

He takes to heart the adage, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Just about anything on the shelves is what you would have found decades ago. That's a bonus for all of us, since it's good stuff. Stephen says it is all

thanks to his dad.

"Everything, I mean everything, is made from scratch. Everything's still made like he did. He loved baking. I'm not real ashamed to say it, but I don't love it as much as he did. I can see him when I do something, I can see him just plain as day. He's the whole reason for it. Now I'm the last in the line. I don't know. I don't know what will happen to the shop. It's been going 85 years. I'll probably work another five years anyway, try to get others in there.

I get up about 1:30 each morning, and I pretty much have

to cut back. I can't do it like I used to. [One] Christmas Eve I could not get up to go back to work. I decided then I better slow down. I need to enjoy life—I don't want it to be my whole life.

"I got one young man come in now, he works in the oil fields, his mother works in the bakery. I tell him 'you won't find an opportunity like that.' It's hard to find someone you can depend on. I've gotta do something. I'd hate to see it just fade away."

Mamaw, Nonnie and Me with Chicken and Dumplings

By Debbie Arnold

As early as I can remember, I was in the kitchen with my grandmothers, Betty Easley Allen and Rellie Strain Horton, both of whom were excellent home cooks. I suppose it was there that my culinary education was born and nurtured. Certainly, it was during those early times either watching or stirring the pot that I realized there was a certain mystique to putting a meal on the table, but it was not something to be feared. It just never occurred to me that I could not cook, and for that early foundation, I am forever grateful.

Mamaw (Horton) and Nonnie (Allen) never claimed to be innovators in the “farm to table” movement; it’s just what they did. What they served and what we ate, almost without exception, came from the field and the pasture. Fresh, canned, churned, smoked and, in later years, frozen—it was home-grown and homemade.

I don’t believe that my memories of those fruits of their labors have been romanticized with the passing years. Breakfast began each morning at Mamaw’s with biscuits, maybe with or without gravy, but always with sweet cream, home-churned butter and as often as not, sorghum molasses or honey. I never saw a written recipe nor did I ever see her measure any of those ingredients, but they were the flakiest buttermilk morsels you could ever put in your mouth. The bacon or ham that Nonnie fried up in one of her many cast iron skillet to go along with her biscuits came from her own smokehouse which still stands on the home place property.



The author with Nonnie, ca. 1955.

Whatever was leftover from those bountiful tables was usually served up again at dinner, most commonly called supper at both houses, or found its way into some form of soup, stew or pot pie. Nothing, literally nothing, was ever wasted.

Lunch, promptly at noon, was always the main meal of the day. Weekdays or weekends, it didn’t matter. Lunch was the meal not to

be missed, and it seemed that most often there were other-than-family visitors who typically found their way to those noontime meals as well. Always a meat, or two, and three or more vegetables with fresh bread and, of course, dessert—the table was brimming.

Whatever was leftover from those bountiful tables was usually served up again at dinner, most commonly called supper at both houses, or found its way into some form of soup, stew or pot pie. Nothing, literally nothing, was ever wasted. If it would not fill a tablespoon, it went into the feed buckets for the chickens or hogs or maybe into the “turnover” pile.

The tending of those “turnover” piles was routinely assigned to me and which, second only to cleaning the chicken houses, became the chore I most detested. It was years later before I realized what my grandmothers instinctively knew. That by turning those scraps and coffee grounds and poop, pure gold was being created and would yield a big return for little effort. “Composting” was not a term they used but was just what they did.

Plus, I knew that was the very best place to go looking for worms when I wanted bait for fishing!

My inheritance might seem of little value to anyone looking for dollars and cents, but to me, it cannot be measured in such a menial regard. My daughter may never shovel out a chicken coop or shout out warnings to any snakes lurking

nearby, but she can put a meal on the table. My grandchildren know that when it comes time to head to the pond to cast out a line, our backyard compost pile is the place to go first. They might not catch a single fish, but they sure do have a grand time playing with those fat earthworms.

Included in my dowry, such as it was, from my Mamaw was her “secret” chicken and dumplings recipe. Now, I say it was secret because that was what one of my aunts told me when I first asked her for Mamaw’s recipe. It was not to be shared, according to her. Of course, when I went straight to the source, you know what I got! I have been making that dish just like my grandmother for well over forty years now. And so have a few others with whom I’ve shared the “family secret.” Mamaw had no idea she possessed such a treasured secret, of course. I’m sure she would be more than pleased for me to continue sharing it as well. And because my aunt is deceased, I surely will not get into any more trouble by doing so. Only we will not be going out to the backyard to ring the neck of a hen that won’t lay or a rooster past his prime to make up a batch. But I could because I learned that as well.

I do not think I’ll ever quite master my Nonnie’s chicken pot pie. And I do not even try to fry chicken like my grandmothers did.

Debbie Arnold is the author of the DiningWithDebbie.net blog. A proud Arkansas native, she is an avid gardener and enthusiastic cook.

Mamaw’s Chicken and Dumplings

(Adapted by Debbie Arnold)

Serves 6-8

5 pounds combination of skin on, bone in chicken breasts and thighs
 1 large onion quartered
 3 stalks celery, cut into 3-inch slices
 2 bay leaves
 1 sage leaf
 2 chicken bouillon cubes or 1 container Knorr chicken flavoring
 32-ounces low-sodium chicken broth
 2 teaspoons Kosher salt
 1 tablespoon freshly cracked black pepper
 Water as needed to cover well



A hot bowl of chicken and dumplings makes everything better. Courtesy of diningwithdebbie.net.

Place all ingredients in a 5-quart slow cooker and cook on HIGH for 6-8 hours. When the chicken is tender and cooked through, remove the pieces to a separate container to cool. Strain broth and refrigerate several hours or overnight.

The chicken can also be prepared on the stove top, but I really think the slow cooker method intensifies the flavor considerably.

Remove and discard the skin and bones of the chicken pieces. Coarsely shred the chicken, cover and refrigerate until ready to use.

Remove the fat from the congealed broth and discard. (Mamaw would NEVER have done such a thing!) About an hour before serving, reheat the broth in a large stock pot, bringing it to a slow boil. Add the dumplings (see recipe below) one at a time, stirring once after all are added. Cover and reduce the heat allowing the dumplings to cook without boiling for 20-30 minutes. There should be ample broth to cover all otherwise add in additional chicken broth or water.

The best way to test that they’re done is to taste. That’s a cook’s bonus, I suppose.

Stir in the shredded chicken and heat through. Taste for seasoning and add additional salt and pepper as needed. The broth should have thickened. If not, cook over low heat until desired thickness is achieved. Turn off the heat until ready to serve.

Dumplings:

As far as I’m concerned, there’s really only one way to make a proper dumpling for Chicken and Dumplings. True Southern dumplings are never, I repeat never, puffy. On that point, Mamaw and Nonnie would both agree so don’t even begin to convince me otherwise.

So what’s the secret to the best-ever chicken and dumplings? It’s really simple.

Mamaw’s dumplings are a simple 2 to 1 ratio of all-purpose flour to buttermilk with some salt and pepper thrown in. The key is not to overwork the dough and to roll it out into thin strips about an inch wide and 1 1/2 inches long. Overworked dumplings create tough dumplings.

For this amount of broth and chicken, I would prepare 2 cups of flour to 1 cup of buttermilk. I like to prepare the dumplings prior to reheating the broth thus giving them time to air dry prior to immersion.

Peter Pasquale and the Arkansas Delta Tamale

By Kat Robinson



Pasquale's famous tamales. Photograph by Grav Weldon.

Every Friday and Saturday morning, a white trailer appears alongside Highway 49 in the Arkansas Delta city of Helena-West Helena bearing the single word on a banner: TAMALES.

Throughout the day, cars pull up and pull away. A scent wafts on the breeze, full of corn and beef and spices and more corn. And while the trailer is new, the scent is ancient to the settled Delta. If you were to go to the window of the trailer, you would be greeted by Joe and Joyce St. Columbia.

The tamales are Joe's grandfather's recipe. The reason they are being sold today has far more to do with Joyce than Joe. One way or another, the tamales, and the way they are made, are unique to the Arkansas Delta, and something that dates back more than a century.

Joe St. Columbia's grandfather Peter came to America in 1892, leaving behind his wife and only son in Cefalù, Sicily, to find his fortune. He landed in New Orleans, all but penniless, and went to work doing what was easy-to-get work, but not easy-to-do work: cutting sugar cane. He cut

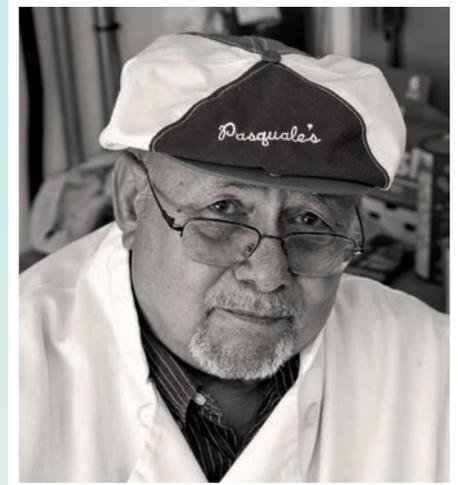
cane for 50 cents a day until he had enough to board passage up the Mississippi River.

He made it as far as Helena. Joe says it is possible his grandfather had run out of money. According to family lore, St. Columbia was the second Italian to make it to Helena, a town already full of Greeks, Germans, Lebanese, Chinese and Jews also seeking a better life in America.

At the turn of the century, Helena was an ethnic stew, a blend of ethnicities smattered into the already growing population of whites and blacks who had been there since before the Civil War, and Mexicans coming north to work the plantations.

In 1897, Peter St. Columbia had earned enough money as a merchant vendor marketing wares to families along the Mississippi levee to send for his wife and son for a visit. They came through Ellis Island and then from New York by train—\$300 for the entire journey. When they arrived and saw how well Peter had done in this new place, they decided to stay.

He was able to pick up languages easily, and his Sicilian dialect of Italian wasn't so different from the Spanish



Joe St. Columbia, the owner of Pasquale's Tamales. Photograph by Grav Weldon.

being spoken by the Mexican families who sent men to the fields to work cotton. He got to know many of them well, and they shared gossip and recipes. He taught them spaghetti, pasta making and Italian dishes—and they taught him how to make tamales. The tamales they would make would include anything from chicken to pork to goat. Tamales were the perfect portable meal to carry in the field because they were better warm, and since they were already packaged in corn husks, they had their own biodegradable container.

The recipe Peter put together was a little different from what he was taught. Instead of the other meats, he used only beef in his, good cuts lower in fat, a finer ground masa and plenty of spices. He would take these out to the fields to sell to other farm workers. They caught on, and the Delta tamale was born: a blend of minced beef and spices in masa, wrapped in corn husks and steamed, far spicier than the Mexican counterpart of the time.

The St. Columbia family prospered in the new world. Peter peddled wares, drove a taxi, ran a grocery and made some investments. By the beginning of World War I the family was doing well, and Peter and his son Sam built and bought properties in downtown Helena. The Depression



Pasquale's Tamales Trailer. Photograph by Grav Weldon.

came about, and they still did just fine—owing to the fact that Sam and Peter never trusted the banks. While those around them lost their shirts and fortunes, they managed to keep their properties and businesses—and purchase more. As Joe related to me, it was not uncommon to hear people speak of the St. Columbia family as such, “Don’t those damn (Italians) know how tough finances are, spending all that money?” Sam’s thought on the matter was “If I do well during the Depression, when there’s no more Depression, I’ll be rich.”

Eugene and Maggie Brown approached Sam St. Columbia about renting out one of his buildings. They were looking for a way to support themselves, and they wanted to open a restaurant that sold soul food, sandwiches and pie. Sam knew he had an empty building that would just sit empty if he did not do something with it—and these folks seemed honest and a good investment. So he agreed to let the Browns use the property on one condition: that they use his recipe to make tamales. And they did, altering it just a little bit. That combination—a Mexican dish recreated by an Italian and produced by hand by an African-American family as soul food—created the Arkansas version of the Delta tamale. And oh how it sold! The Elm Street Tamale Shop took off, and it became well known in the area, with folks coming

out of the woodwork to buy tamales. The couple did well, selling the tamales alongside other soul food like turnip greens, pig ears and sandwiches they’d make there. They also built a pushcart and took it around from one juke joint to another on Walnut Street, with the chant “One for a nickel, three for a dime. Sell a lot more, but there just ain’t time.”

The Elm Street Tamale Shop prospered and stayed open through World War II. Eventually, the owners died from old age, and Joe St. Columbia’s two brothers bought it back. They ran an Italian deli in the same spot for 10 years, still serving those tamales.

Joe, on the other hand, went into the insurance business—and then into the ownership of a beer business he ran for 20 some-odd years. When his brothers folded up their food business, the tamales went away for a while. But there was a day when Mammie Davis (Joe’s maid) and Joyce, Joe’s wife, got a hankering for tamales. They got out the old recipe and started working those tamales and made a mess of them. Joe got home and had some, and they were good. Joyce said there was a real need for these tamales, and they should start making them again. So they did, in the kitchen at the beer factory.

Joe restarted the business, except this time, it was all about making the tamales. His daughter-in-law Rhonda had done research, and had discov-

ered that Joe’s dad Sam’s original first name was Pasquale, which he did not care to share since it sounded foreign. Thus, Pasquale’s Tamales was born. Joe got a factory going. The operation started off first as a hand-crank deal with a lot of labor involved, but then the St. Columbias purchased a mechanical extruder and conveyor belt system, and they started making tamales in batches of 200 dozen.

They started a restaurant that sold Italian dishes alongside tamales. They worked furiously, putting in 18-hour days. Tamales got hot in the region again, and they just kept going and going until Joyce had a heart attack. Joe came to the realization that although the tamale factory and the restaurant were going strong, both took a lot of their time and effort. And as Joe puts it, “All the money in Phillips County wouldn’t be worth it without her.”

And the dust settled. Joe sold the tamale factory to a guy who had a heart attack soon thereafter, and Joe bought it back. He pared the operation back significantly. He stopped doing mail-order sales of tamales, got the trailer and just did tamales two days a week, on Fridays and Saturdays.

And that is where you will find them today, alongside Highway 49 two days a week, usually selling every tamale they have before the day is done.

It’s no wonder. There are no preservatives in these golden tubules of gastronomy . . . also known as tamales. They are made from finely ground cornmeal, chopped sirloin, fresh garlic and onion and a plethora of spices, steamed up in corn shucks and served hot.

Everything’s all-natural—no fillers, no lard, no bull. Well, the sirloin . . .

From the Rooter to the Tooter: Hog Killing Time in Arkansas

By Cindy Grisham

On farms all over Arkansas, the beginning of winter was marked by the ritual known as hog killin'. It may have more closely resembled a harvest festival than any other single event. Hog killing was not a one man operation. It involved every member of the family and often all of the neighbors and was a mixture of food, fun, and a lot of hard, dirty, smelly work. Many old timers said that in the old days families used every part of the hog except the squeal. One woman in Cross County told her offspring that you used every part of the pig from the rooter to the tooter.

Pork has long been identified as the state's most popular domesticated meat. Before refrigeration, beef had to be eaten soon after slaughter, but pork could be preserved by salting or smoking without the aid of cooling. Pigs could also survive on their own in the woods, eating acorns and rooting for other edibles, multiplying prodigiously, all without the assistance of humans. When winter rolled around and it was time to put up some meat for winter, all one had to do was throw out some corn and wait for the year's meat source to wander up and get themselves shot. Once stock laws came into effect in the twentieth century, pigs retained their popularity because they took up little space and ate whatever scraps the family had to feed them.

Cold weather was necessary for hog killing, since warm weather hastened spoilage. The process would begin before daylight with the building of fires under large pots and water was put on to boil. The animals were shot in the head

Many old timers said that in the old days families used every part of the hog except the squeal.

One woman in Cross County told her offspring that you used every part of the pig from the rooter to the tooter.

and their throats were slit with a sharp knife to allow them to bleed out. Then they were put into the pots of boiling water to scald the hair loose. Sometimes the carcasses had to be turned, since the pot was not large enough to hold the entire animal under water. Once the hair was loosened, it was scraped from the skin with knives.

Once the hog was scraped of hair it was hung by its back legs and split open carefully to allow the entrails to be pulled out and collected in a wash tub or other large container. The inside of the carcass was washed out thoroughly and then taken down and moved to a flat surface for butchering. Pieces like the backbone, tenderloin, pork chops and ribs were usually divided among those helping and were taken home and eaten quickly fresh. The shoulders, hams, and side meat were salted down and taken to the smoke house. There they hung for weeks, absorbing the smoke and curing for year round use. Some families used what was called a

sugar cure, which allowed the meat to cure without the smoking process. It was a mixture of salt, brown sugar, and sodium nitrate and could be purchased at the store. It was rubbed into the skin, which was left attached to the various cuts, and placed in a cool secure place to cure.

While the men did the butchering, the woman took over processing the entrails. The heart, liver, kidneys, and lights (lungs) were removed, pulled from the tub and washed and placed in another container. The intestines were cut into small sections, turned inside out and washed and cleaned. They could be used for casings to hold sausage or cooked and eaten as chitterlings. The head was also split open and the brain removed. It would be scrambled with eggs for breakfast. The head would then be washed and placed in a large pot to be boiled, sometimes with the feet. Once it had cooked the meat was cooled enough for handling then pulled from the bones and placed in a large loaf pan and pressed firmly. Some of the cooking liquid would be poured on top and allowed to settle in the crevasses. Because of the cartilage that boiled along with the meat, the liquid would congeal. This delicacy was called head cheese or souse and was sliced like a luncheon meat and served on bread or crackers.

The rest of the entrails had to be eaten quickly as well. One northeast Arkansas family was treated to an annual meal of something called Hashly. The heart, liver, and lights were seasoned and boiled and then cut into a fine mince. From there they were placed back in the broth and potatoes, carrots, and onions, diced

equally fine, were added to the pot and cooked until it thickened up. The stew was then seasoned with lots of black pepper and enjoyed for several meals. If the intestines were to be cooked as chitterlings, they were boiled in large pots with bell peppers and onions. They could be eaten straight from the boiling pot or drained, patted dry, and fried in a skillet. There are no fence-straddlers in the chitterlings debate. They are a dish that is either relished or hated, and it is often said that if you ever

Once stock laws came into effect in the twentieth century, pigs retained their popularity because they took up little space and ate whatever scraps the family had to feed them.

get a bad chitterling you will never, ever touch another one. Because of this, chitterling cooks are careful to always clean their own, never trusting anyone else to do the work.

Lean scraps would be gathered up and run through a sausage grinder. The old grinders were screwed securely to the edge of a table and someone, usually one of the children, would hand crank the grinder while the women fed the meat into it. After the meat was ground it would be seasoned to each family's particular taste with black and red pepper and sage. Often, someone

would be standing by to fry samples of the sausage to determine when the seasoning process was just right. The freshly ground sausage could then be processed in two ways. It could be stuffed into some of the cleaned intestines and smoked for later use, or shaped into patties and fried. The patties would then be packed in jars and the hot grease left over from the cooking process would be poured over them. The jars would then be sealed and in that manner the sausage could be kept for several months. When sausage was needed, it was dipped out with the fat and warmed in a skillet.

One of the more objectionable and smelly parts of the butchering process was the rendering of lard from the fat. All of the scraps of fat were collected and thrown into a large pot and heated to melt the fat. Lean meat and skin that were attached to the fat would float to the top of the pot and could be skimmed off. These tasty morsels were called cracklings and could be eaten as a snack. More often, they were added to the cornbread batter with the result being crackling cornbread.



John Kemper of Houston, Arkansas, butchering a hog, ca. 1920. Courtesy: George Kemper.

Although labor intensive, Arkansans looked forward to hog killing time every year, not only for the fresh meat but for time spent with friends, family, and neighbors.

Cindy Grisham is a historian and author from a long line of Ozarks storytellers. Her recent publications are When Hope Grows Weary: Tyronza, Arkansas and Its Place in History and A Savory History of Arkansas Delta Food: Potlikker, Coon Suppers, and Chocolate Gravy.

Social Media and the Changing Food Landscape

By Michael Roberts

At this point, checking social media to see what I'm going to have for lunch has become as much a part of my morning routine as a shower and a cup of coffee. Long gone are the days of being in the dark about daily specials, holiday hours, or that new shipment of imported prawns that the chef is highlighting this week, because in today's interconnected world, all that information is available at the touch of a screen on a device that fits in a pocket. To say that social media has revolutionized dining is an understatement—social media has done more to bring growers, sellers, preparers, and consumers of food together than anything in the history of mankind.

Use of direct social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram brings a level of parity between local cooks and their multi-national chain competitors that is impossible to achieve with paid advertising on television or in print, while crowdfunding sites like Kickstarter have opened up new pathways to raise the massive amount of cash needed to start a restaurant. The beauty of these platforms is that they allow local restaurateurs a means of putting faces and names to food concepts they are promoting, while the back-and-forth nature of comments and re-tweets makes the consumer feel like he or she has a personal stake in everything that their favorite restaurant or food truck posts.

Apart from advertising that only requires the time spent setting up and using social media services, the various platforms also serve as a virtual dinner table where food lovers from all over can discuss their favorite dishes, post pictures, and give

feedback, both positive and negative. Word-of-mouth advertising has always been essential to the survival of local restaurants, and every tweet, Instagram photo, or Facebook post builds exponentially on the word-of-mouth concept. Savvy chefs develop personal relationships with prolific users, developing something akin to free focus groups to hone their skills and menus.

Perhaps no upstart in Central Arkansas has embraced this new way of doing things better than South on Main restaurant, a joint project between the *Oxford American* magazine and chef Matthew Bell. Bell, along with his wife Amy, are masters of social media, posting pictures of their food and information about the various specials and concert events happening at their restaurant, all of which serves to keep their restaurant fresh in the minds of potential diners. Where the Bells really succeed beyond these basic techniques is with their personal touch. It is not uncommon to see candid shots of the South on Main staff appear on Instagram or Twitter, and unlike some restaurant owners who shy away from pictures taken by guests, the South on Main bunch promotes such pictures on their own platforms. By including the guest in something bigger, the South on Main staff make guests feel like "part of the team." Social media also helps to promote the local growers that South on Main strives to use whenever they can, which is a breath of fresh air when compared to the mystery ingredients featured on so many big-chain menus.

Stand-alone restaurants like South on Main are not the only beneficiaries of this new digital realm. When Matt Clark and Melissa Melton decided to go into business for them-

selves, opening a brick-and-mortar store was beyond their means, so they decided to dive into the competitive and growing Arkansas food truck scene with their truck Waffle Wagon. For a food truck, social media is more than just a way to promote a brand and post pictures of food: it is the life-line that connects the truck with its clientele. Daily posts about truck locations, lunch and dinner specials, and truck events ensure that followers of the Waffle Wagon not only know where to find their beloved chicken and waffles, but also allows guests to once again feel like they are a part of something bigger—in this case, a food truck fan club.

In a landscape as crowded as the restaurant business, any small edge that gets people thinking about a particular place can mean the difference between success and failure. Before the digital age, restaurants either had to spend massive amounts of money on television, radio, or print advertising or hope for a positive review in the local paper and friendly word-of-mouth. Social media gives these restaurants several platforms with which they can connect with diners, and it allows them to steer the conversation and respond to criticisms directly, as well as keeping their names fresh in the memories of the public—and all with just an investment of time and creativity. It is a vastly different world than what we had just a couple of decades ago, making it ever easier to answer that age-old question "What's for supper?"

Michael Roberts is one of the creators of and writers for the award winning ArkansasFoodies.com. His work has appeared in Sync Weekly magazine, and Arkansas Life.

Featured Cookbook

From Our Collection

Our Best Home Cooking

Bella Vista German-American Club, 1988

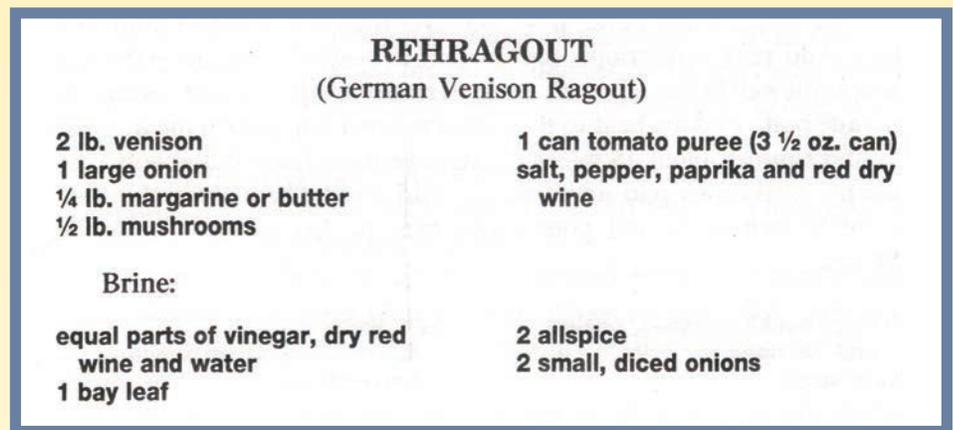
By Kat Robinson, Guest Editor

Arkansas isn't as much a melting pot as it is a stew of different cultures, nationalities and ethnicities. In amidst all the different cultures well represented in Arkansas today, you will find Italian, Mexican, Greek, Chinese, Vietnamese, Indian, Arabic, Japanese, Korean, French and South American cuisine represented throughout the state. Yet one of the more prevalent cuisines, German, is served up in a mere handful of eateries across The Natural State.

While Eureka Springs' Bavarian Inn has served a couple of generations and Emmy's German Restaurant has offered Fort Smith area diners spaetzel and schnitzel since 1962, German populations have kept their culinary traditions alive through church congregations, local clubs and the occasional cookbook.

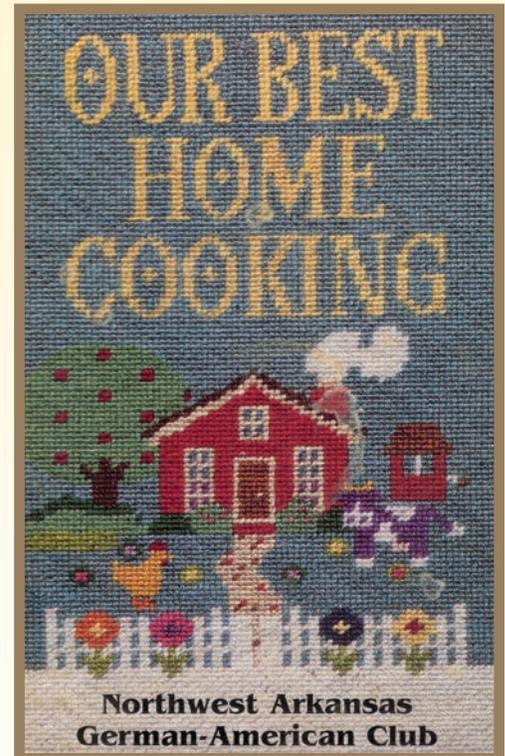
Bella Vista's German-American Club published *Our Best Home Cooking* in 1988. The club, which began with just six members, would come together once a month for what it called "Gemuetlichkeit," which is defined as "a situation that induces a cheerful mood, peace of mind, with connotation of belonging and social acceptance, coziness and unhurry." In that same vein, many of the recipes within called for long cooking times, lots of simmering and plenty of non-hurrying. Names such as Leberknodelsuppe (Liver Dumpling Soup) and Beetenbortsch (Red Beet Soup) may inspire chuckles from today's diners.

Ever to take advantage of lo-



cally available meats and produce, the book does contain a recipe for Rehragout (German Venison Ragout)—that, unlike many similarly named recipes from Germany, calls for tomato puree and mushrooms instead of leeks, sour cream, vinegar or pig's blood. This Arkansas-sized version might well be best served "mit Spätzle."

Kat Robinson is a food and travel writer. Her recent publications include Arkansas Pie: A Delicious Slice of the Natural State and Classic Eateries of the Ozarks and Arkansas River Valley. She also serves as Communications Manager in the Tourism Division at Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism.



Cover of the Northwest Arkansas German-American Club Cookbook.

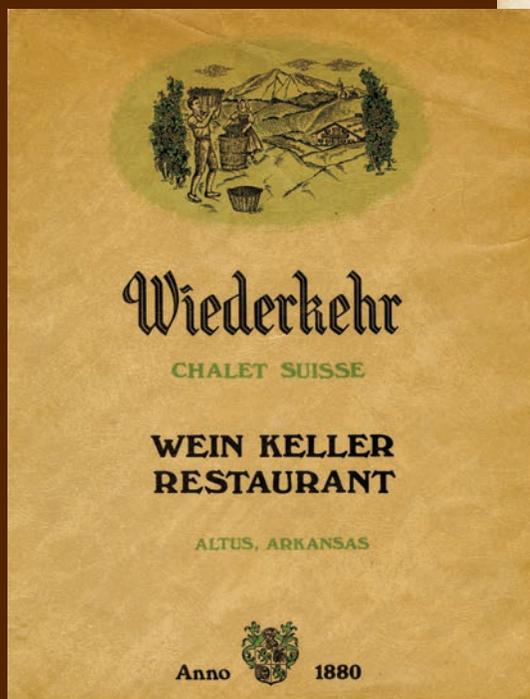
ARKANSAUCE

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Featured Menu

Menu from Wiederkehr's Weinkeller Restaurant, ca. 1970. The original wine cellar was hand-dug by Johann Andreas Wiederkehr, a Swiss immigrant to Franklin County, in 1880 and converted to a restaurant in 1967. From the Arkansas Menu and Recipe Collection (MC 1908).



Good Appetite ... En Guete ...



APPETIZERS

Shrimp Cocktail	\$ <u>7.00</u>
Fruit Cup	\$ <u>1.35</u>
Bismark Herring in sour cream	\$ <u>1.60</u>
Imported pâté de foie gras Strasbourg	\$ <u>2.25</u>
Imported Salami and Swiss Cheese	\$ <u>1.75</u>

FONDUE BOURGUIGNON (For Two or More)
Cubes of choice beef, served with a variety of sauces. According to Swiss tradition, each guest cooks his own beef at the table and selects a sauce. \$ 5.25 Per person
May we suggest: Burgundy or Rosé wine

STEAK GENEVA
Choice cut of sirloin steak served with special butter sauce. \$ 4.50
May we suggest: Claret or Cynthiana wine

VINTAGE WINE STEAK
A delicious sirloin steak tenderly marinated in Wiederkehr wine, then broiled to your taste. \$ 4.50
May we suggest: Claret or Rosé wine

APPENZELLER GOULASH
From the farming regions of Switzerland. This goulash is simmered in a piquant sauce and served with traditional "spätzli" or Swiss baked potato. \$ 2.95
May we suggest: Claret, Chianti or Cynthiana wine

CHATEAUBRIAND

	Medium Size	\$ <u>4.75</u>
	Large Size	\$ <u>5.50</u>
	Large for Two	\$ <u>9.00</u>

May we suggest: Burgundy or Cynthiana wine

COMPLETE DINNER INCLUDES A GLASS OF DELIGHTFUL WIEDERKEHR WINE, SOUP, VEGETABLES, SWISS BAKED POTATO OR FRENCH FRIED POTATOES, SALAD, ORIGINAL FRENCH BREAD.

Additional glasses of wine - 35c

Please check wine list. Wines listed under entrees are merely suggestions. Feel free to order any wine you desire.

A meal without wine is like a day without sunshine . . . Ein Essen ohne Wein ist