



Gravy

"If God's going to take me, he's going to take me with a belly full."

— Caillou Bay fisherman, cooking 300 pounds of shrimp, on the night before Katrina made landfall

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NEWS FROM THE SOUTHERN FOODWAYS ALLIANCE

Southern Foodways Alliance Recognizes New Orleans Guardians of Tradition

During the July Field Trip to New Orleans, SFA celebrated and examined the role of sugar in the South's culinary history, feasting at some of this country's best restaurants along the way. But we also honored those men, women, and establishments who have served New Orleans as "Guardians of Tradition."

"The heroes of our cuisine are often unsung and uncelebrated women and men," said Lolis Eric Elie, one of the organizers of the field trip and the primary force behind the awards. "Their considerable skills tend not to be rewarded with the type of fame and fortune that is increasingly part and parcel of the white tablecloth world of celebrity chefs and destination restaurants. Still we recognize that they are the essential elements, the foundations of American cuisine in general and Southern cuisine in particular. So we have established the Guardian of Tradition series, to be awarded at each Southern Foodways Alliance field trip. In this way we hope to bring attention to those cooks, chefs, restaurateurs, and others in our various regions whose work has help keep alive the tradition of Southern foodways. In this way, we hope to remind them, the world, and ourselves of their crucial importance of maintaining those traditions on which our cuisine, our region and our identities are built."

Individuals recognized include Dottye Bennett, waitress and "star" of her father's restaurant, Charlie's Steak House; Lionel Key, who learned to make filé during a two-year apprenticeship with his great uncle; Milton Prudence, who rose from dish washer to executive chef of Galatoire's during his 35 years there; the Roman Taffy Man, originally Sam Cortese and now his grandson Ron Kottemann, who carries on the tradition of selling handmade taffy out of a mule-drawn cart; Willie Mae Seaton, who has cooked down-home meals at Willie Mae's Scotch House for some 50 years; and Anthony and Gail Uglesich, who built a national reputation for the quality and creativity of their seafood at Uglesich's.

Establishments recognized are Angelo Brocato's Ice Cream, owned by the Brocato family, which for a century has provided New Orleans with rich ice creams, spumoni, cookies, and pastries; Domilise's, an uptown lunchroom that began serving some of New Orleans's best po' boys 80 years ago; Hansen's Sno-Bliz, which has served snowballs of ultra-thin shaved ice and homemade syrups for six decades; Jazz Fest, where former producer Nancy Oschsenschlager and chef Michelle Nugent have made high-quality New Orleans cuisine available to music lovers since 1970; the Leidenheimer Bread Company, which has provided the city's po' boy shops with bread for more than a century; Mauthe's Dairy, known for more than 75 years for its superior milk, cream, and Creole cheese; and the Vietnamese Market, where Thieu Ly and Finh Nguyen have offered fresh seafood, live poultry, and fresh produce every Saturday morning for the past 20 years.

Each of the Guardians of Tradition was presented with a special award designed by artist and MacArthur Grant recipient John T. Scott. Plans are afoot to collect oral histories with each of the recipients. Look for those to appear on the SFA Web page in the coming months.



Lyndhurst Foundation Grant

The Lyndhurst Foundation of Chattanooga, Tennessee, which had its beginnings in the philanthropic activities of Thomas Carter Lupton, a pioneer in the Coca-Cola bottling business, has awarded SFA a grant of \$5,000 for general support. SFA deeply appreciates the support. Visit their web site at www.lyndhurstfoundation.org.

Tim O'Brien Releases Cornbread Nation

This fall, look for TWO full albums of American folk by singer and songwriter and SFA member Tim O'Brien, *Cornbread Nation* and *Fiddler's Green*. The title track for *Cornbread Nation* was written especially for SFA and draws a parallel between traditional food and music—subjects dear to O'Brien's heart. Other songs on the album, like "Long Black Veil," "House of the Rising Sun," and "Busted," showcase his knack for interpreting contemporary songs and making them his own.

SAVE THE DATE

Taste of the South at Blackberry Farm
January 6-8, 2006

Field Trip to Apalachicola and Environs
May 18-21, 2006

⇒ GRAVY ⇐

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The Encyclopedia of Cajun and Creole Cuisine

By Chef John D. Folse.

Chef John D. Folse and Company Publishing, 2004. \$49.95.



The Encyclopedia of Cajun and Creole Cuisine is a hefty book, both in weight (about ten pounds) and thoroughness in treating its subject. It is the self-described "birthright and obligation" of Chef John Folse, the man designated by the state legislature as "Louisiana's Culinary Ambassador to the World."

The 850-page cookbook, history text, photo album, and reference source is divided into three sections. The first devotes a chapter to each of the seven cultures that Folse identifies as having significantly contributed to the creation of the Cajun and Creole cuisines (Native America, France, Spain, Germany, England, Africa, and Italy). This section can be textbookish in spots, but the relevance of the historical information does ultimately come through. The second section is the sweet spot: the recipes (more than 700 of them). Folse's classic recipes are well written, often anecdotal, and cover everything from basic sauces to pig roasts to classic cocktails (often considered basic sauces in Louisiana). The recipes are divided into standard categories, but Folse is true to his mission, as when he devotes several pages to the creation and evolution of brunch.

The final chapters reveal Folse fulfilling his duties as Culinary Ambassador with tributes to the festivals, plantations, personalities, and local brands that exemplify, celebrate, and preserve the essence of Cajun and Creole cuisine.

It is impossible to describe this book without remarking on the striking photography. The best shot of all is the cover, a reproduction of a 1933 photo called "The Oysterman," with Folse perched, barefoot, atop a mound of spent oyster shells, looking like he may have eaten more than he's added to the oyster can. Snapshots and portraits of historical figures add personality to the historical material in the first section, and vibrant close-up shots of Ponchatoula strawberries and plump eggplants interspersed with the recipes will inspire even the most timid cooks.

-Angie White

Dining at Monticello: In Good Taste and Abundance

Edited by Damon Lee Fowler.

University of North Carolina Press, 2004. \$35.



Dining at Monticello contains two sections: essays and recipes. To explain how Thomas Jefferson's delight in French cuisine only complemented his love of American ingredients, editor Damon Lee Fowler says, "Clearly, he relished the best from both sides of the Atlantic." Women ran the household, and Jefferson hired Europeans to train his slaves in gardening. Slave James Heming trained with chefs in Paris, and Heming in turn trained cooks at Monticello. As President, Jefferson set the standard for entertaining in Washington.

Throughout his life, Jefferson paid careful attention to the acquisition of a huge variety of interesting foods, including over 300 types of vegetables. He toured the vineyards of France and also made tasting notes on Italian wines, Madeira, and Sherry. Historical explanations accompany all the recipes, which are attributed to relatives or to Jefferson himself. Beef Soup Monticello draws from "Observations on Soup," Jefferson's recording of classic French techniques. More French-inspired dishes include Braised Artichokes with Fine Herbs, Asparagus with Herb Vinaigrette, Beef à la Mode, and Blancmange. Other dishes, such as Catfish Soup, Okra Soup, Baked Virginia Ham, Broiled Shad, Apple Fritters, and Pepper Vinegar made with Texas Bird Peppers, reveal American influences.

Dining at Monticello is a beautifully designed and fascinating way to learn history—a "feast of reason," as granddaughter Ellen Wayles Randolph would say.

—Karen Cathey

In a Pickle

Post-Katrina, individual SFA members have helped with fundraising efforts in various locations. In Louisville, for example, local initiative has resulted in the swift production of a Southern-style specialty product, hot pickles, to raise funds for Gulf Coast-area restaurant workers displaced by Katrina.

The Louisville hot pepper venture began to take shape after local SFA members and others from Cincinnati and Nashville asked the organization for help. “We got into this,” said SFA member John Egerton, “when Bill Kamman, who owns and operates Pops’ Pepper Patch Inc. in Louisville, offered to make and market a batch of special-label pickles at cost.”

Kamman made his offer on September 7, two days after Katrina made landfall in the mouth of the Mississippi River. One week later, 100 cases of the product, with 12 jars to the case, were in production. The special-label “S.O.S. Sharpies” made their debut at Camp Bacon in Louisville on September 16. Kamman’s pickle company will be reimbursed for any undonated costs, such as ingredients, jars, and boxes. Close to 90 percent of the case price of \$120 will go directly to the

relief fund in Houston for food-service workers whose jobs were washed out by Katrina.

Since its founding in 1999, the Southern Foodways Alliance has frequently pursued programs and activities that spotlight the unsung heroes of our great food heritage. This has brought to notice a host of traditional artisans, aged-ham curers, sausage makers, honey and cane syrup makers, preservers of heritage seed products, grain millers, makers of wines and cheeses, and many more.

Bill Kamman fits that profile. “Ever since I was a little kid,” he said, “I’ve loved homemade pickles and lots of other great things to eat that came out of Southern kitchens like the ones I grew up in. The food people of this region are a breed apart. They always show up at your door with something to eat when you’re facing hardships. It’s a barn-raising mentality—you just naturally want to pitch in and help.”

Check www.southernfoodways.com for how to get your own case of S.O.S. Sharpies, or call 662-915-5993.

From the President

Dear SFA Members,

First, my profound thanks and congratulations to all in New Orleans who put together an amazing event. The Field Trip was imagined and executed by an all-volunteer crew including Lolis Eric Elie, Sara Roahen, Brett Anderson, Sarah O’Kelley, Brooks Hamaker, Scott Simmons, Poppy Tooker, Liz Williams, Elizabeth Pearce, Matt Konigsmark, Pableaux Johnson, Susan Tucker, and the Eversmeyer family. Marcelle Bienvenue provided wonderful insight into the sugar cane industry and the people behind it. Our sponsors—Tabasco and Southern Comfort—enabled us to do it with panache and at an affordable price.

Many of our members who wanted to join us in New Orleans but could not will be happy to know your board is working hard to address this challenge. One of the ideas we’ve begun implementing is a series of regional dinners, kind of mini Field Trips. We’re calling them Day Camps, and the first one, lovingly named Camp Bacon, happened on September 16 in Louisville. To learn more, point your browser to www.southernfoodways.com. Going forward, Angie Mosier is helping members organize their own events. If you’d like to initiate a dinner, contact Angie at food@angiemosier.com.

Our oral history work is progressing. In the coming months Amy Evans will be working with, among other groups, bacon curers in Kentucky, tamale makers in Mississippi, and beekeepers in Florida. Looking toward to our May 18-21, 2006, Field Trip to Apalachicola, Florida, she will be collecting histories from oystermen and fisherwomen.

And please keep Southern Foodways in mind when you think about charitable giving. We have so much work to do and so few resources! The organization needs and appreciates your support.

Yours around the table,
Elizabeth Sims

Iconic Southern Restaurants: Blue Bonnet Café, Marble Falls, Texas

By Jeff Siegel

The Blue Bonnet Café probably isn’t the largest employer in Marble Falls in the Texas Hill Country. But it could be, for there seems to be a waitress for every table, all of them remarkably pleasant and all of them indisputably Texas.

This has been part of the Blue Bonnet’s charm since it opened in 1929, when Marble Falls was nothing more than a spot on U.S. 281, about 35 miles northwest of Austin. Today, the town is not only a popular recreation destination (there are a couple of lakes nearby—the falls have been dammed up to make the lakes), but it’s also on the edge of Austin’s building boom, as the city moves inexorably north and west.

Fortunately, very little has changed at the Blue Bonnet. It’s still a ramshackle couple of buildings connected by some hallways, located just north of the bridge on the east side of the highway. You’ll drive past if you’re not careful. These days, there are tourists, and there’s a line to get in on the weekends, especially for breakfast. But go during the week, and you can still see a small Texas town—a grown daughter and her mother having a late breakfast, a couple of local businessmen having an early lunch, and owners John and Belinda Kemper working the cash register as well as the crowd.

There is chicken-fried steak, done as it should be done (even at breakfast), and the biscuits are square, with a good crust and tender insides. The other specialty? The pies, baked fresh daily, including the meringues, each high enough to serve as a meal all by itself. And how can anyone pass up a Blue Bonnet coffee mug, a value at \$2.95?

This Just In! Full-time SFA Oral Historian Hired

University of Mississippi Chancellor Robert Khayat awarded SFA a one-time development grant of \$30,000. Those funds, combined with an ongoing \$15,000-per year grant from Birmingham-based Jim 'N Nick's Bar-B-Que, fueled the hire of SFA's first full-time oral historian. Amy Evans, who built the program, first as a graduate student and later as a freelancer, began work in late July.

New Oral Histories Online

A survey of the bartenders of New Orleans, underwritten by Southern Comfort and collected by SFA oral historian Amy Evans, is now online. Viewed in the light of the recent tragedy, they are especially poignant. Also live now are interviews with Kentucky bacon producers and the family that operates Doe's in the Mississippi Delta town of Greenville.

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Gulf Coast Foodways Renaissance Project

The Southern Food and Beverage Museum in New Orleans and The Southern Foodways Alliance at the University of Mississippi in Oxford are collaborating on *The Gulf Coast Foodways Renaissance Project: An Oral History Initiative*, an effort that chronicles the impact of Hurricane Katrina on the foodways of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast while concurrently tracking the rebirth of New Orleans restaurant industry. We are looking for related stories. If you have a story to share, please visit www.southernfood.org or call 1-888-926-1999.



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