

The Chatham Historical Journal

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Recipes from Chatham County

Compiled by Barbara Irwin

Recipes from Chatham County that follow are divided into three sections. The first section focuses on what used to be the county's major export – rabbit – where a traditional recipe passed along in the oral tradition is included. The second section includes traditional recipes from families in the area as well as recipes copied from a cookbook published by members of the congregation of St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church in 1968; this cookbook is no longer in print. The third and last section features two recipes with North Carolina traditions from the Market Café at Ferrington Village, a 20th-century country village.

Part I

Rabbits and Chatham County

From the 1880s through the early 1920s the shipment of dressed wild rabbits for human consumption occupied an important place in Chatham's economy, according to Fred J. Vatter, past president of the Chatham County Historical Association. When the railroad came through the western part of the county in 1884, local folks began shipping dressed rabbits to markets as far away as Baltimore and New York. Some New York restaurants featured "Chatham Rabbit" on their menus. Trapping rabbits became a way for young farm boys to supplement the meager income of their farming families. By the end of 1904-1905, about 40,000 rabbits had been sold at Siler City, the major rail shipping point.

From "When the Rabbit Rescued Chatham" by Fred J. Vatter in *Chatham Crossroads* (April/May 2000), p. 3

Barbara Irwin served on the CCHA Board of Directors in 2000 and 2001. Her professional background includes museum administration and collection of oral history. She and her husband, Whit, live in Ferrington Village.

Rabbit

Ruth Horton of Pittsboro described the preparation of cooked rabbit in her family:

"Mama put out one or two rabbit boxes [traps]. She'd check them and when one was caught, she'd snap its neck and cook it up for breakfast. Daddy skinned it. She cut it into pieces, keeping the hind leg in one piece, with two back pieces and the head. She'd salt and pepper it good and dip it in flour and then fry it in lard. Just like chicken. She usually made gravy, putting flour in the fat and browning it real good, then adding water. Some people made rabbit stew, but I don't know how to do that. Boil it, I guess, and add the dumplings, like chicken and dumplings."

Told to Jane Pyle, May 2000

Part II

Recipes from Chatham County Residents

Mozelle's Chicken Pie

This recipe from Mozelle Riddle of Bynum appeared in an article by Cherry Parker in the *Chatham County Herald*, 6 June 1979.

4 chicken breasts,	1 stick margarine, melted
cooked and boned	1 cup sweet milk
1 cup chicken broth	1 cup all-purpose flour
1 can cream of chicken soup	1 tsp. baking powder

Chill chicken breasts, broth, and soup. Mix flour, milk, margarine, and baking powder and pour over chilled chicken. Bake at 350 degrees until done or golden brown.

English White Mountain Cake

From Mary Roberts Hayes (b. 1839), grandmother of Wade Barber, Sr., and greatgrandmother of Mary Hayes Barber Holmes.

1 pound sugar	½ pint milk
½ pound butter	1 1/4 pounds of flour
½ pint egg whites (9 or 10)	2 tsp. baking powder

Cream well butter and sugar. Add milk. Sift flour and baking powder. Add to the mixture. Beat egg whites to a stiff froth. Add to the mixture. Flavor to taste. Bake 45 minutes in a moderate oven.

Persimmon Pudding

Elizabeth Edwards of Siler City contributed this recipe.

2 cups persimmon pulp	1 cup butter or margarine
2 eggs	1 teaspoon vanilla
2 cups milk	2 cups sugar
1 teaspoon cinnamon	2 cups self-rising flour

Beat eggs slightly. Add sugar, persimmon pulp, and flavorings. Add milk alternately with flour. Add melted butter last. Cook in large pan at 350 degrees for 1 hour.

Pepper Relish

From Allie Peoples Bell (Mrs. Daniel L. Bell) in Recipes Old and New: St. Bartholomew's Parish, 1833. (Pittsboro: 1968). St. Bartholomew's was consecrated on 9 June 1833. Judge Daniel Bell was Sunday School Superintendent for 22 years.

12 sweet red peppers	3 pints vinegar
12 sweet green peppers	4 tablespoons salt
12 good-sized onions	2 cups sugar

Grind red and green peppers and onions through medium blade of food chopper. Cover with boiling water and let stand fifteen minutes. Drain, cover with boiling water again, let stand 15 minutes and drain. Add vinegar, salt, and sugar. If the vinegar is very strong, use only 1 quart, adding 1 pint water. Cook 30 minutes and seal while hot.

Fresh Corn Griddle Cakes

From Sylvia Bynum Paige.

1 cup self-rising corn meal
1 egg
1 cup milk – more or less
3 or 4 ears of corn cut off cob

Cook on greased, medium-hot frying pan. Dip batter from bottom of bowl. Cook as you would pancakes.

Scalloped Oysters

From Mrs. A. B. Chapin, submitted by her granddaughter, Elizabeth Chapin Hatch Gould, to Recipes Old and New: St. Bartholomew's Parish Cookbook.

1 pint oysters	1 cup cracker crumbs
2 tablespoons milk	½ cup stale bread crumbs
4 tbl. oyster liquid	½ cup melted butter or other fat

salt and pepper

Mix crumbs and stir in the melted butter. Put thin layer in bottom of shallow baking dish, buttered. Cover with one-half of the oysters, sprinkle with salt and

pepper. Add another layer of crumbs, then remaining oysters, oyster liquid and milk. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Cover top with crumbs. Bake 30 minutes at 350 degrees. Salmon or tomatoes may be substituted for the oysters.

Flapper Pudding

Recipe from Avis Autry, in Recipes Old and New: St. Bartholomew's Parish Cookbook. Mrs. Autry was the church organist.

¼ pound butter	½ lb. confectionary sugar
3 egg yolks	1 pint crushed pineapple,
2 or 3 oz. nut meats	drained
5 oz. graham crackers,	ground or rolled

Cream butter and sugar. Add beaten egg yolks. Drain pineapple. Add pineapple and nuts. Blend. Grind or roll graham crackers. Place layer of crackers in pan, using one-half of crumbs. Spread pineapple mixture over crumbs. Cover with remaining crumbs. Chill and serve.

Rock Cream

This recipe was a traditional family favorite for generations in the Ihrle, Hill, Powell, and London families. It was submitted by Evelyn Powell and Helen London for Recipes Old and New: St. Bartholomew's Parish Cookbook.

Add two tablespoons gelatin to one quart milk. Let stand one hour. Put in double boiler and boil slowly with one cup sugar. Beat six egg yolks and add to milk and sugar. Cook until thin custard. Beat egg whites with 1/2-cup sugar and fold into custard. Add ½ teaspoon vanilla and pour into individual molds. Chill several hours. Unmold and top with whipped cream, sweetened and flavored with brandy or wine. Very good to take to sick or to use as dessert.

Drying Corn

Eliza Bynum passed along this recipe, which was copied from an original handwritten recipe recorded by Grandmother Clegg. From Recipes Old and New: St. Bartholomew's Parish Cookbook.

Drop ears of corn into a pot of boiling water and let them stay 2-3 minutes. Take them out and cut off grains. Spread kernels on a clean cloth and dry them in the hot sun. Before cooking corn for table, soak it all night, then stew it and serve with butter, salt, and pepper.

Part III

The Market Café at Ferrington Village

Ferrington Village in Pittsboro has roots in 1786 when Jesse Ferrington's great-great-grandfather, William Cole, purchased a 640-acre farm in Chatham County. For

nearly two centuries the farm was passed from generation to generation. In 1974, the Fitch family purchased the Ferrington farm and embarked on converting the farm area and surrounding land into a country village. The old granary at the Ferrington farm has been transformed into a busy country store where the Market Café serves informal lunch and dinner and weekend brunch. The following recipes were contributed by former Market Café Chef Cindy Bankoski; both recipes are favorites with several generations of Cindy's family.

Ragout de Veau a la Rameses

(Serves four or more)

2 or more pounds of veal leg or rump, cut into one-inch pieces

1/4 pound applewood smoked bacon

2 large onions, sliced

bay leaf, pinch of fresh thyme, few sprigs of parsley

egg-size lump of butter

1/2 pint sour cream

salt and pepper

Lightly flour the veal and add salt and pepper. Brown the veal in olive oil in a stew pot. Remove to a platter. In the stewing pot, add butter cut in pieces, bacon, sliced onions and top with herbs. When mixture begins to smoke, add the veal, cover, and cook for 1/2 hour. Add warmed sour cream and mix thoroughly. Serve immediately over rice.

Southern Style Sweet Potato Casserole

Filling:

2 lbs. sweet potatoes, peeled, cut in large chunks, and boiled until soft

2 whole eggs

2 teaspoons cinnamon

1/2 - 1 pint heavy cream

1/2 teaspoon nutmeg

1 cup brown sugar

ginger, just a tiny pinch

salt and white pepper to taste

Topping:

1 pound butter, softened and diced

1 cup brown sugar

1/2 teaspoon nutmeg

1/2 cup white sugar

4 cups flour

2 teaspoons cinnamon

2 cups pecans, shelled

Filling: Allow potatoes to cool slightly after boiling and draining. Put all potatoes in mixer, adding remaining ingredients for filling. Mix and season to taste. Scrape entire filling into an ovenproof casserole dish.

Topping: Using hands or pastry blender, first blend butter and sugars until thoroughly mixed. Add spices and continue to blend until evenly distributed. Add flour and mix until it can be formed into a loose ball. Add pecans last and mix thoroughly. Crumble topping over filling.

Bake in 375-degree oven until bubbly and top is crisp and brown. Serve and enjoy!

Bread

by Vivian Cole*

When I was a child no one in our area of rural North Carolina would deny that bread is the staff of life. And by "bread" they meant biscuits and corn bread. Farmers' wives made biscuits two or three times each day, and corn bread was cooked an average of once a day.

Of the two, biscuits were the more important. No farmer I knew would eat a dish of cold cereal and go to work. Nor would he have a slice of toast and a cup of coffee for his breakfast. He might have the dish of cereal along with two eggs and several strips of bacon along with three or four fresh home-made biscuits.

At our mid-day meal – we called it dinner – fresh biscuits were made, but that was the main meal for serving corn bread. The corn bread was eaten with the vegetables, but most people preferred biscuits with their meat – if there happened to be any. And if there were no dessert, a buttered biscuit with some jelly or preserves made an acceptable dessert.

Now all these biscuits were made from scratch. The nearest thing to a biscuit mix was self-rising flour, which required the addition of only shortening and buttermilk. It had to be buttermilk! I had never heard of refrigerated or canned biscuits, nor could I even have imagined such things. At school I heard horrible things about eating biscuits made from self-rising flour, but Mother used it anyway most of the time. It saved her the time of measuring the soda, baking powder, and salt, and the time of blending them well into the flour. And we never came down with those terrible ailments which our friends said would kill us if we ate that flour.

If a lady had fewer than one biscuit per person left from a meal, she felt she was not cooking enough for her family. She had many uses for these left-overs, even if there were a dozen. Mother's favorite way of using left-over biscuits was to slice them through the center, butter them, and toast them in the oven. Daddy would not eat a piece of toasted "light" bread, as he called it, but he was very fond of these toasted biscuits. Sometimes Mother would make a cream gravy with sliced onions in it. When the onions were tender she would add the toasted biscuits, cook for a few minutes more, and serve. She called it "milk toast," and she and Daddy could make their supper off that.

Vivian Cole's family home was approximately where Cole Park Plaza is today. Her reminiscences appear in many issues of the Chatham Historical Journal. This one originally appeared in two CCHA Newsletters in 1999 and is reprinted here to preserve it more effectively.

These toasted biscuits were also used in beef stew made with only onions. When the beef began to break apart into shreds, toasted biscuits were dropped into the stew. After cooking until the bread had absorbed enough of the broth to be thoroughly moistened, it was ready to eat. This dish was called "beef hash," and was a great favorite at corn shuckings.

To me, the best way of using left-over biscuits was to make bread pudding. Mother would crumble the biscuits very fine, add eggs, sugar, and milk. To this mixture she sometimes added just vanilla, but usually she added cocoa. It was then baked in the oven for a short while, and came out a wonderful chocolate pudding which, with a dollop of whipped cream, was a dessert good enough for company, I thought.

***Corn bread was the bread for dinner,
which was mostly vegetables.***

Corn bread was the bread for dinner, which was mostly vegetables. Some people wanted it with all vegetables while others had a selected list which went well with corn bread. My own list included leafy vegetables – of which I liked very few – and any kind of beans or peas with the exception of butterbeans and English peas.

We made two kinds of corn bread – the kind Grandmother Byrd made and the kind Grandmother Cole made. At that time I liked Grandmother Byrd's bread better. She mixed the meal with cold water and fried the mixture in a very thin cake. When the bread was a golden brown on both sides, I liked to split it and put butter between the two crusts. This was supposed to make our cheeks round and rosy so we could eat all we wanted of it. That was before the days of cholesterol. But this was the kind of bread Grandmother Cole called "dog bread."

We called Grandmother Cole's kind of bread "muffin bread" even though we never baked it in muffin tins. This bread was made with soda, salt, a little melted shortening, an egg, and buttermilk. It was poured onto a greased griddle also, but much thicker than Granny Byrd's. After frying for a while on top of the stove, it was placed in the oven to bake until it was done enough to be turned on the griddle. When it was turned it was again cooked on top of the stove until both sides were nice and brown.

As I said, people ate corn bread with vegetables, but it also was necessary to have corn bread to serve with fried fish. A few people, including Mother, liked corn bread with fried chicken. Barbecue and Brunswick stew also were better with corn bread, according to some.

When Mother began teaching Frances and me to make bread, she started with Granny Byrd's corn bread and gradually advanced to Granny Cole's. We made some sloppy messes at first, but Mother was patient. Finally it became our responsibility to cook the corn bread for our meals.

One morning when I was about nine or ten years old, for the first time Daddy called me to get up and cook breakfast. He said Mother was sick, and he couldn't cook because they were shorthanded in the milk barn. It was up to me if we had any breakfast. I felt pretty sure I could cook sausage and eggs, but cooking biscuits was another matter. I couldn't even ask Mother what to do; I just had to try to remember how she did it.

Thankfully we had self-rising flour, which I sifted into a bowl. I added some shortening – not enough as I recall – and I added the milk. Too much! I needed more flour. After adding first one and then the other, I finally was able to get the dough together in a round ball.

Neither of my grandmothers nor any of their daughters rolled and cut their biscuits. They pinched off a small amount of the dough, rolled it between the palms of their hands, then flattened it and placed it in the pan. So that is the way I did.

When my biscuits came from the oven I was amazed. Where were those beautiful, brown, uniform shaped biscuits all the ladies made? After all my work, mine looked like lumps of clay. The only thing brown was the heavy dusting of flour on them. They were hard and dry, and where the flour was not worked into the dough they split apart. I wanted to cry! But my loving father told me I did well. He even ate those horrible things.

By the next meal Mother was able to make the biscuits. And soon after that she began easing me into the biscuit-making program. Eventually I got to the place I was assigned the task of making the biscuits for dinner. And all of us ate some of them.

Today I wonder if I could make a biscuit from scratch. However, with all the good canned biscuits on the market, and in packages of only five, I doubt that I ever try it.

The Chatham Historical Journal is an occasional publication of the Chatham County Historical Association. Its purpose is to disseminate items of historical interest about Chatham County. To be considered for publication, articles or photographs should be previously unpublished, of reasonable length, and include detailed sources of information.

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