

The Heritage Cooking Series

Breaking bread in the low country

by P. Elizabeth Wilson*

Historically, cooking has been a truly exciting exercise that calls for practical skills. It is the basic for happy meals and sound health and presents an opportunity to exercise personal creativity as well.

"These abilities were evident everywhere when we toured the coastal community known throughout the Southeast as the Low Country - Savannah, Georgia and Daufuskie and Hilton Head Islands, South Carolina.

It is through the region's recipes that we were permitted a glimpse of life in and around the Low Country. Taking its personality from the ocean, it is different, delicious and almost impossible to describe. It appears infinitely old, tenderly young, charming, mysterious, innocent, yet a little evil and hauntingly beautiful.

We arrived in Savannah, which like San Francisco, seems more a region of the heart than a city with its graceful and leisurely qualities. Savannah has been called "the best kept secret in America", "the best planned city in the United States", and "one of the most cultivated cities in the world." For the past couple of centuries, she has continued to charm almost all who come to know her beautiful squares, her splendid mansions, her plantations, her fine restaurants, and her individual qualities.

We began to discover the magic that is Savannah with the guidance of our host, Benjamin Tucker, president and manager of WSOR Radio. We visited first with Mrs. Louella Morgan, who was preparing Red Rice.

Just as no self-respecting southern pig could imagine a higher distinction than becoming a Virginia Ham, so too with Carolina rice prepared in the red by Mrs. Morgan. She methodically illustrated Red Rice as a side dish prepared in a sauce of vegetable juice and seasoned to taste, as a main dish with the addition of browned smoked sausage, and as a quick dish using instant rice - all delightfully sumptuous. Whether for a few or a multitude, cooking is as much an enjoyment to the warmhearted Mrs. Morgan as she is a godsend to the mighty 1200 member congregation of the First African Baptist Church of North America.

Long before the 1870s man hungered for a better and happier life. If this hunger could not move him to toil and battle for the realization of his vision then and there, it did thwack him into the pursuit of the world beyond. Among the earliest leaders in Savannah was Andrew Bryan, a man of good sense, great zeal and some natural elocution. He founded and pastored the First African Baptist Church of North America in 1788. We visited the First Church and were fortunate enough to meet Mr. Calip Bias. It was almost as if part of him lived for the opportunity to share the First Church heritage with others, he was so proud.

The hallways and resplendent alcoves housed the hand-carved first communion table, the pipe organ that had been installed during slavery, a huge piano bench that could hold

enough sheet music and hymnals for the entire congregation and other magnificent antiques. We moved into the sanctuary, with its semi-circular seating, to be mesmerized by the stained glass windows that will forever present the awesome images of the founding fathers. The likeness of Reverend Bryan looks like all our grandfathers or the one we never knew along with the five other pastors who served from 1788 to 1907. Just as when they actually stood in this pew, their images still thunderously echo motivation, strength and power to all who come within. The church's charm is truly an art form.

About this time, the wonder and splendor of it all having just about sapped our strength, we headed for the home of Nelson Moore. Moore has been a caterer in the Low Country for the past twenty years, featuring originality in cooking. His imagination speaks to the demands of the Low Country cuisine - fish and shellfish, the mainstay of the diet.

Innumerable occasions, both religious and secular, have called for a ceremonial board - harvest days and holidays, birthdays and burial days, weddings and anniversaries, reunions and tourist days.

You won't have to fish for culinary compliments if you dangle bait like Nelson's Southern Seafood Original before guests.

Nelson's Southern Seafood Original

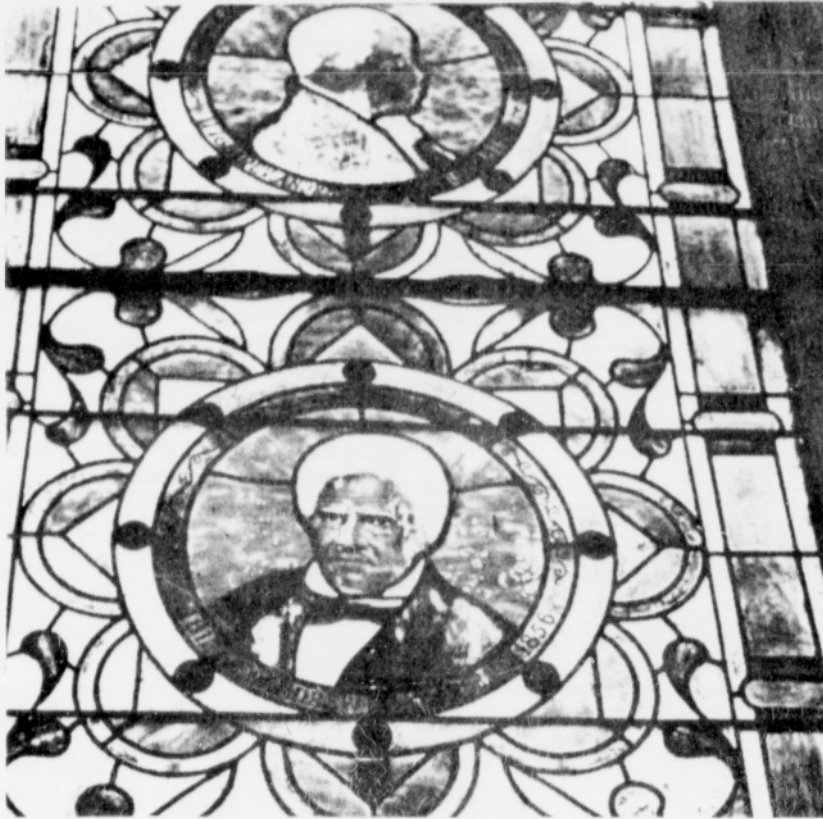
2 lbs. shrimp, peeled and deveined
6 eggs, boiled and chopped
1/4 cup sandwich spread
1 tablespoon onions, finely minced
1 tablespoon bell peppers, minced
3 tablespoons pitted ripe olives and pimientos, finely minced
2 tablespoons sweet relish
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
Dill weed, lemon pepper, dry, mustard, seasoned salt.

Boil shrimp until pink. Do not overcook. Remove from heat, drain, cool, then dice. In medium sized bowl, add onions, bell peppers, olives and pimientos. Stir in relish and eggs. Mix well and then add diced shrimp. Next, add Worcestershire sauce, lemon pepper, dry mustard, dill weed and seasoned salt to desired taste. Mold and serve on lettuce bed. (4 to 6 servings)

Okra Soup

1 cup chopped onion
10 bacon slices, cut into 1-inch pieces
5 cups water
128 oz. can tomatoes
1 lb. beef bones
3/4 cup barbecue sauce
1 1/2 teaspoons salt
1 1/2 lbs. okra, sliced

Saute onion and bacon. Add water, tomatoes, neck bones, barbecue sauce and salt; bring to boil. Cover; simmer 1 1/2 hours. Add okra; simmer additional 30 minutes. (16 1-cup servings)



In 1788 Andrew Bryan founded and pastored the First African Baptist Church of North America, in Savannah. His image will continue as a source of inspiration to his following from atop the hand-made stained glass window of the sanctuary. (above)

Red Rice

1 16 oz. can tomatoes
1 1/4 cups water
1 cup rice

1/2 lb. cooked smoked sausage, cut into slices
1/2 cup french dressing
1/2 cup chopped green pepper

1/2 cup chopped onion
1 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon hot pepper sauce
Dash of pepper

Combine ingredients; bring to boil. Cover; simmer 30 to 35 minutes or until rice is tender, stirring occasionally. (6 to 8 servings)

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