**Cooking and Food Culture in Kentucky Resource Guide**

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**Introduction:**

This resource guide is designed to provide you with tools to help people engage with the past and connect with others. There are images to share with your clients, information about food prices, and articles about cooking and food culture in Kentucky.

**Images:**

-Encourage your audience members to look through the images included in the kit and to share any memories they have about their favorite recipes, cooking processes, appliances, supplies, and the equipment they used. See the keyword list for terms you can use with the questions.

Some conversation prompts can include:

* What do you want to say about what is going in this picture?
* What do you think is happening in this picture?
* What kind of stove did you and your family use for cooking meals?
* Who was the main meal preparer in your home?
* What was a typical breakfast meal, lunch meal, and dinner meal when you were growing up?
* How have cooking and baking changed in your lifetime?
* What is a favorite food or meal you like to make?
* What was a typical breakfast meal, lunch meal, and dinner meal when you were raising your own family?
* Did your family make homemade ice cream? What was that process like?
* What canning method (pressure cooking; hot water bath) did you use?
* What was the item you canned most?
* Where did you store the items that you canned?
* How have cooking and baking changed in your lifetime?
* Tell me about your canning process.
* Did you or your family ever smoke meat?
* What kind of meat(s) did you smoke?
* What were the roles for men and women in the smoking process?
* Tell me about the steps/processes you and your family used when processing a hog and/or smoking meat.

**Keywords and phrases:**

-Canning

-Canning seals

-Cast iron

-Cook stove

-Curing

-Drying

-Dutch oven

-Garden

-Harvest

-Hot water bath

-Ice box

-Mason jars

-Produce

-Preserves

-Pressure cooker

-Putting up

-Refrigerator

-Storing up

**Cost of Living: Food**

Information taken from the BiFolkAl programming guide:

Erickson, Lynne Martin and Kathryn Leide. (1983). “Remembering 1924: A Program Manual.” Madison: Bi-Folkal Productions, Inc. p. 29.

Eggs, per dozen $0.42 (1924) $0.65 (1977)

Sirloin steak, per pound $0.38 (1924) $1.98 (1977)

Milk, per quart $0.11 (1924) $0.45 (1977)

Butter, per quart $0.48 (1924) $0.55 (1977)

Oleomargarine, per pound $0.28 (1924) $0.55 (1977)

Bread, per pound $0.09 (1924) $0.61 (1977)

Corn flakes (8 oz.) $0.09 (1924) $0.42 (1977)

Sugar, per pound $0.09 (1924) $0.33 (1977)

Coffee, per pound $0.40 (1924) $7.19 (1977)

**Book to share:**

*Food and Everyday Life on Kentucky Family Farms, 1920-1950* by John Van Willigen (2009).

Based on interviews conducted by the University of Kentucky's Family Farm Project and supplemented by archival research, photographs, and recipes, Food and Everyday Life on Kentucky Family Farms, 1920–1950 recalls a vanishing way of life in rural Kentucky. By documenting the lives and experiences of Kentucky farmers, the book ensures that traditional folk and foodways in Kentucky's most important industry will be remembered. (Book summary provided by Amazon.)

**Oral History Interviews:**

-Share some clips from these oral history interviews, which are available from the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries. After playing clips or an entire interview, encourage your audience members to share their own memories. Use the keywords and phrases listed above to help generate conversation too.

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Interview with Betty Cornett, December 28, 2016

*Stinking Creek Stories Oral History Project*

Interview Accession 2017oh004\_scs021

https://kentuckyoralhistory.org/ark:/16417/xt734t6f4h09

(The section about canning is between the 23:12 and 24:09.)

Interview with Marie Morton McCoy, July 1, 1992

*Family Farms of Kentucky: Farm and Farmstead Oral History Project*

Interview Accession 1992oh227\_ff251

https://kentuckyoralhistory.org/ark:/16417/xt715d8ng20t (canning and drying food)

(The canning portion begins at the 13:45 minute mark and ends at 21:30. The drying portion begins at 21:35 and ends at the 23:00 minute mark.)

**Articles:**

You may want to ask additional questions related to the following articles.

-Article 1 mentions that a local cannery opened up to allow the town’s residents to use its services. Did you ever use a professional canning facility to can your produce?

-Article 2 has a discussion of food safety with regard to canning What does your audience like (or dislike) about this article?

-Article 4 contains a reference to a woman talking about her canned goods like this, "Unlike housework when the day is over you have rows of beautiful jewels in jars that you know you can pull out in the middle of winter and have a taste of summer.” How did your audience feel about their canned goods?

**Article 1:**

75 years ago: Minch released from service after 3 years

October 21, 2020 | Owenton News-Herald (KY)

Section: Today's Features

75 Years Ago

Oct. 18, 1945

Opening of the Local Canning Plant Friday  
  
By request of several patrons of the Owenton cannery, L.W. Smith, manager, states arrangements have been made for an emergency opening all day Friday. Any who need to use this service are requested to bring food stuffs at the time as this will be the last canning day until further notification.

**Article 2:**

Remembering how we canned everything

August 9, 2019 | Richmond Register, The (KY)

By Ike Adams/Points East | Section: Opinion

Not long after Loretta started her career as a family development and management specialist with Kentucky State University, I made the mistake of telling her how my mother, and most other women on Blair Branch, went about canning, up to a thousand or more, quart jars of vegetables, fruits and preserves every year.

My wife was up to date on all the latest canning procedures and safety precautions the universities had to offer and when I started telling her how we did it on Blair Branch, she wondered how and why any of us were alive to tell about it.

For example, we had no idea that jars of kraut were supposed to be boiled for half an hour or whatever after the kraut had finished fermenting. This would have made it sterile and hot enough to make the jar lids seal.

It had never crossed my mind to try sealing canned kraut until I met Loretta, but we have spent decades doing it her way. I can't tell that it tasted any different than Blair Branch kraut and I feel fairly sure that it won't poison me even though I still secretly believe it's a lot of extra work for nothing. Don't be telling my wife I said that.

I never bothered telling her that, in addition to kraut, we never bothered sealing pickled corn, pickled beans, dill pickles, or mixed pickles, the latter being a combination of corn, beans and cabbage. We simply added water, salt and a small splash of vinegar to what was pickling, let them sit somewhere that wouldn't stink up the house for a couple or three weeks, and let them ferment to work their magic. When the jars stopped bubbling over, we removed and washed the lids, added water to replace whatever had run out during fermentation, replaced the lids and washed the jars clean with scalding water. No canner was involved unless we used it to clean the jars.

A couple of weeks ago, one of the newspapers I read ran a feature story with photos of a lady who had recently canned 56 jars of beans, tomatoes, kraut, strawberries, black berries, apple butter, corn and three or four types of jelly and jam.

I was impressed but I would bet big money that my sister-in-law Brenda Joseph, who lives there on the banks of Smoot Creek at Hotspot in Letcher County, has well over a hundred jars put up by now and that she still isn't finished canning. I'm hoping that several pints of her pickled sweet corn have my name on them but I've been told that the flying rats (starlings) did a number on her corn patch.

When I was growing up, my Mom and a few of my aunts and cousins spent the better part of almost every weekday canning. Mom wanted at least 200 quarts of beans put back and at least 100 quarts each of kraut, tomatoes, apples, peaches, strawberries, blackberries and vegetable soup mix. A few dozen jars each of beets, bread and butter pickles, apple butter, peach and pear preserves, tomato juice and a host of jams and jellies also went into our larder as well as ever every nook and cranny in the house. A walk-in "pantry" about 5x10 feet, 8 feet high and several shelves deep on all four walls was stacked, floor to ceiling, with canned goods.

When main crops of produce, especially beans, tomatoes, apples and peaches came into season, it was impossible to keep up with canning them on the kitchen stove.

We often used the same big wash tubs, normally used to heat laundry "wash" water, to do canning over an open, outdoor fire. Towels and burlap feed sacks were squeezed between the jars that were stacked two or three layers deep to keep the jars from breaking one another as they boiled for whatever amount of time they were allotted. Up to 25 or more jars could be canned at one time as opposed to only seven in our more conventional canners.

But in those days, if we had not canned most of what we ate throughout cold weather and well into spring, we would have been on starvation. I can't recall a single time, when I was growing up, when I couldn't find a jar of something to eat if I felt hungry.

**Article 3:**

Canning becoming popular again

August 18, 2019 | Richmond Register, The (KY)

By Cathie Shaffer | Section: Lifestyles

GREENUP -- An old adage claims that what is old will become new again.

That's the case with home canning which is becoming popular once again. While some home canners learned at a very young age, others are picking it up well into adulthood. A recent class at the Extension office in Greenup County brought together would-be canners of various ages. They learned the basics and then prepared and water-bath canned salsa.

Those participants may well be on their way to the kind of self-sufficiency that keeps numerous families fed. In the homes of two particular Greenup County women, keeping the canners cooking is a daily activity that starts early and often ends late.

Ann Stephens Breedlove kept up the practice even as she settled into urban life. Back on the family home place again, she has kicked her canning into high gear.

"I started when I was a teenager," she said. "My father was in the hospital at the VA and my mother went to be with him every day. I'd drive her there, then come home to watch my little brother and go back for her.

"Since she wasn't able to can the stuff from the garden, I did."

Breedlove says all she really needs to buy at the store are milk, bread and snacks since their small farm provides everything else they need. A shaded coop holds chickens while an expansive garden produces a wide variety of vegetables and fruit during the growing season.

"Here's my fruit," Breedlove said as she opens the door to a tall freezer. The shelves and door are jammed with strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, huckleberries and more, all grown by the couple.

An above-ground cellar made of concrete blocks has lines of shelves where canned food is kept. Full meals can be made what is found there as jars of vegetables sit with tomato juice, spaghetti sauce, chicken and meat.

To keep from heating up the house, Breedlove uses an electric stove in the garage for her canning. She is exacting in keeping things clean, including covering the stove with a tarp when it's not in use.

On a small place near Argillite, Sheryl Akers Stone's concern is enough shelf space for the many cans that accumulate during the growing season. Along with canning fruits, vegetables and meat, Stone also dehydrates fruits and vegetables for future use. She shares pictures of her daily work on social media and recently added a pix of the many quarts and pints of tomato juice she put up that day.

Stone's interest in canning also began early. She laughs as she remembers being snapping green beans and washing jars when her grandmother canned. It was after she married that Stone began canning in earnest.

Different foods are processed in different ways while canning. Some are done by a water bath method while others require a pressure canner. Breedlove uses both methods while Stone mostly relies on a pressure canner.

Because they are married to hunters, both women can venison. It is, Stone says, the best method because the deer meat is more tender and tastier if canned before used in a meal. She also makes jerky, a family favorite.

The population on the Stone farm has grown with the addition of pigs and cows. Breedlove is adding chickens to their place. Both women intend to preserve meat to continue to decrease the need to buy from grocery stores.

Stone and Breedlove both belong to on-line canner groups, but they are experienced to know that some of the advice given there needs to be taken with a dose of skepticism.

"The ways our grandmothers used are different than how thing are done today," Stone said. "The most important thing is food safety. No one wants to make anyone sick."

At that canning class at the extension office, Lora Pullin had a mantra she repeated frequently.

"Research-approved," she reminded the attendees. "If there's not research behind it, stay away from it."

**Article 4:**

Historical Society News: Canning in jars dates back more than 160 years

July 24, 2019 | Owenton News-Herald (KY)

By Bonnie Strassell - Owen County Historical Society

At the close of summer, they find themselves nestled between rows of canned tomatoes, beans and squash. Like crown jewels they reflect the light and cast hues of red, orange, pale green and purple; and cradled inside the confines of these small glass jars of jellies and preserves memories are created of people, places and times spent with mothers and grandmothers, held captive in aprons and overseeing the yearly ritual of canning.

Anyone who has ever lifted the lid of a freshly canned jar of jelly can attest to the mouth-watering magic it performs as visions race through the mind of freshly baked biscuits, slathered with thick chunks of butter and a spoonful or two of jelly.

Canning in jars was patented in 1858 by John Mason, a tinsmith from New York who invented the screw-lid which sealed a jar. Actually, Mason invented the lid first. The jar came about afterward.

Canning has been a Kentucky tradition since the late 1800s, and today, as many folks are returning to the land and growing their own food, it is making a comeback.

Owen County women have always canned, and many times it made a difference between a winter of hardship or one of plenty.

Besides a full larder what is it that the ritual of canning provides for folks? It's back-breaking work performed over a hot stove during the middle of summer.

According to Owen County librarian Julie Donahue, "It gives me a sense of satisfaction," and that's the answer given by many Kentucky women.

One Perry County woman expanded on that statement, "Unlike housework when the day is over you have rows of beautiful jewels in jars that you know you can pull out in the middle of winter and have a taste of summer.

"I can't tell you whether I save money or not, but I'm feeding my family the best quality food available without dyes or preservatives, and it tastes so much better than anything you can find in a store."

Years ago crab apple trees were plentiful in Owen County, and many from the area made some of the best crab apple jellies in Kentucky.

The crab apple tree is the only type of apple tree that is native to America. When Dr. Daniel Drake traveled through Kentucky in the late 1700s, he noted, "Crab apples were gathered after they were exposed to the mellowing influence of the first few white frosts. It was our great resource for preserves throughout the year, and certainly, no cultivated fruit is better."

Children's librarian Susan Hampton recalls making crab apple jelly with her grandmother. She spoke of the many crab apple trees growing in Owen County years ago, though over time the number has dwindled considerably.

"We had crab apple trees on my grandparents' farm, and there was one in front of the old school in town," she said. Though Susan and her sister tried their hand at making crab apple jelly after their grandmother died, "It just didn't taste the same."

Most have heard the stories of Johnny Appleseed who traveled through Ohio, Pennsylvania and Illinois planting apple seeds. What many may not know is during frontier times if anyone planted 50 apple trees he could make a claim on the land. Johnny (whose real name was John Chapman) was able to make claims on thousands of acres, which he in turn sold to settlers once the apple orchards took hold.

Johnny's apples were quite small and tart, making them undesirable to eat, but ideal for making hard cider and applejack. Cider was much more valuable to the early pioneer than an edible apple. It could be sold or bartered, and in rural areas, cider took the place of wine, coffee, tea and even water which could contain bacteria that was absent in the cider

Canning was not only a family tradition. It created a sense of accomplishment and provided a wealth of stories to share over a cup of coffee and a thick slice of fresh bread liberally smeared with real butter and a generous dollop of grandma's homemade jelly.

Our next meeting will be held Aug. 8, at the I.O.O.F. Hall. The fellowship will begin at 6:30 p.m., and the program begins at 7 p.m. I am waiting for confirmation from our speaker but will include particulars about the program in next week's article.

We would like to thank all of you who join in the vision of the historical society with your membership, your support and your donations. Your involvement is greatly appreciated as we continue to preserve Owen County's rich history and traditions.

**Article 5:**

The Best of Bena Mae “Simple Pleasures”

June 28, 2017 | News Journal, The (Corbin, KY)

Author: Bena Mae Seivers Book Author/Columnist | Page: B1 | Section: News

Heating up the stove was an early morning ritual in the house I lived in the 1930’s and 40’s as it was in the houses up and down the street.

It began about 5:30 a.m. in the living room and kitchen with Daddy stirring up the banked coals in the big warm-morning stove in the living room while Mama did the same in the kitchen, getting the cook stove ready to make breakfast. I never could understand how her meals always turned out so good cooking on a stove with no temperature gauge but I guess housewives back then had the feel for when the stove was ready for cooking.

She started by making biscuits--if I could count the biscuits she made they would be in the thousands because we had them every morning.

She never measured the ingredients She would put an egg-sized lump of lard into the bread bowl of flour, add buttermilk and baking powder and they came out light and fluffy every time.

We would eat them with gravy made from the drippings of sausage, pork chops, sometimes fried chicken, and if Daddy had a lucky day of hunting, fried quail. I remember Daddy’s hunting dogs which he loved, Maggie and Kate, a red pointer and an Irish setter. We fed them table scraps because there wasn’t such a thing as dog food back then, and every night he made sure they got fed as soon as supper was over. “Sis, did you feed the dogs” was a common phrase we heard every night as we washed the supper dishes.. But I digress.

We lit into Mama’s sumptuous breakfast like pigs every morning, sopping our biscuits into the delicious gravy made from whatever meat she had on hand. This was followed by fried eggs, fried sweet potatoes, fried apples, (people were big on fried foods back then) and oatmeal--I’ve eaten oatmeal every day of my life since then and fed it to my family. Dietitians today would choke on the amount of calories and fat we took in, but back then breakfast was the most important meal of the day making sure that the man of the house and children going off to school were prepared to face the day.

I think about that today when I see the skimpy breakfasts people are eating that have no nutritional value whatsoever. A donut, a bran muffin, a glass of orange juice and out the door.

And I wish, oh, how I wish that my microwave could turn out the wonderful breakfasts Mama cooked up on that big kitchen range that never let her down. I could eat her biscuits and gravy three times a day.

Memo:

Cat Head Biscuits

My mother-in-law used to make these biscuits. My father-in-law called them Cat Heads.

Ingredients

2 cups self-rising flour

1 cup buttermilk

Lump of solid shortening the size of a walnut (butter, margarine, lard, or solid vegetable shortening)

Instructions

Place flour in a large mixing bowl.

Push the flour to the sides of the bowl to form a depression in the center.

Place the shortening and a little of the milk in the center and start stirring with a big spoon. When the shortening is blended, add the rest of the milk, mixing just until blended and dough forms a ball.

Place wax paper on a flat surface and sprinkle it with flour.

Roll the dough out on the wax paper. Do not handle the dough any more than you have to as it makes the biscuits tough. The less you handle it and the more moist the dough, the better the biscuits will be.

Pat dough gently until it is about 1½ inches thick.

Cut out biscuits and place them in a greased pan.

Be sure the pan is small enough so that the biscuits are touching.

Bake in a 400 degree F oven until biscuits are lightly brown.

(A condensed reprint from the Bena Mae archives.)

**Article 6:**

Written memories provide insight to Owen County's past

February 1, 2017 | Owenton News-Herald (KY)

Section: Bonnie Strassell - Owen County Historical Society

Images of Owen Countians were captured in photographs, their daily lives recorded in letters, diaries and family histories, and stories of their undaunted spirit were shared by one generation to the next.

It is these vital pieces of long ago that bind the past to the present and give us insight into our history.

In a 1950 News-Herald insert, articles written by several Owen countians created a nostalgic journey to bygone days.

Jim Lawrence, son of Joe and Annabel Atha Lawrence, wrote of the difficulties and blessings of growing up on a farm.

"There were many times during the year when Dad would trade or swap work with our neighbor. This included the peak season of raising tobacco and wheat-threshing.

"That large, noisy thresher and long drive belt were something to behold. Many Fourth of July holidays were interrupted because the wheat thresher unit was passing by your farm."

Jim described the much-coveted cut-off saw.

"The farmer who had a cut-off saw was much revered. Truly, he was 'one of them good ol' boys.' The cut-off saw was a converted T Model Ford with a large, circular saw blade mounted at the rear and was run directly from the disconnected drive shaft. It seemed that each year the cold weather lasted longer than the woodpile. Those drum stove ate up the locust, oak and ash very fast. We had a Home Comfort cook stove. It was purchased in 1935 or 1936. The stove had a warming closet for storing food for supper if there was any left over from dinner. The added heat was great on cold days, but boy was it hot during summertime.

"How much we trusted God to provide a good growing season. Work days were Monday through Saturday. Sundays were for going to church and family dinners. This was the Lord's Day to be held in reverence."

Hog killing, hunting, trapping, fishing, making popcorn in a wire basket over hot coals in the wood burning drum stove, raising chickens, sheep, cows and horses all defined life on an Owen County farm.

In his article, S.L. Martson recalled owning a 142-acre farm on Gratz Road in 1940. "To improve the productivity of our land, we cut all bushes and weeds on 40 acres, removed all rocks from 18 acres, used 4 tons of lime, 2,700 pounds of phosphate and spread 100 tons of manure. In order to live at home as much as possible, we canned 520 quarts of fruits and vegetables; stored 20 squash and pumpkins, 600 pounds of flour, 40 bushels potatoes, hickory nuts, apples, pears and sweet potatoes."

Mr. Martson also raised hogs, chickens, and cows, and his meticulous records of income and expenses provided him with the information he needed to run a successful farm.

Beuna Kinmon wrote of her work in a small Owen County grocery where Honey Crust bread was 25 cents for a double loaf and sugar was bought in 100-pound cloth bags. Buena also described a bill in her possession that listed the cost of an Owen County funeral.

"I also have a statement of the cost of a funeral in 1930: casket $175; embalming, $10; hose,$1, slippers, $3.75; dress, $15; hearse, $10. The hearse providing transportation from the hospital to the funeral home was free, and one spray of flowers was provided free of charge."

Mary Frances Riddle attended Cedar Hill, a one-room Owen County schoolhouse. She walked the mile to school every day and "when I would get there, I was greeted by my friends, Margaret Mills, Cora and Carrie Morrow, Wilma Hill Smith, Evelyn Spurrier and Flossie Shields. There were no lunchrooms, and I would carry my lunch in a small, tin lunchbox. My Aunt Mable Clifton gave me an aluminum drinking cup which would mash together to fit in my lunchbox."

The passage of time introduces new inventions and old ways of doing things become obsolete, but perhaps old ways also produced blessings. As Jim Lawrence relates: "The small community village is all but non-existent. Modern roads, automobiles, airplanes and computers are now the norm. The penny postcard has been replaced with the 33-cent stamp (1950). The one-room school is now a county-wide system. The man on the moon is more than an expression. Dirt roads have become six-lane expressways. Water is now available by turning a faucet handle rather than going down to the spring with a water bucket. Perhaps we are going too fast to enjoy the real issues of life: a walk by the creek, listening to a mockingbird, hearing the prayer of a child, communion with friends during Sunday worship. We cherish so many wonderful memories of Owen County life."

The Owen County Historical Society would like to thank all of you who have helped us preserve the memories of not only Jim Lawrence, S.L. Martson, Beuna Kinmon and Mary Riddle, but of all those whose written letters, diaries and family histories are vital to the preservation of Owen County history and traditions.

Our next historical society meeting beings at 6:30 p.m., Feb. 9, at the I.O.O.F. Hall. All members are encouraged to attend to help plan future fundraising opportunities for the society. Your suggestions are greatly appreciated.



Source:

Daderot. (2017, December 20). Exhibit in the Old Colony History Museum - Taunton, Massachusetts, USA. Retrieved from: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cook\_stove,\_Walkers\_Portable\_Range,\_George\_W.\_Walker,\_Boston,\_1870,\_iron\_-\_Old\_Colony\_History\_Museum\_-\_Taunton,\_Massachusetts\_-\_DSC03834.jpg

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