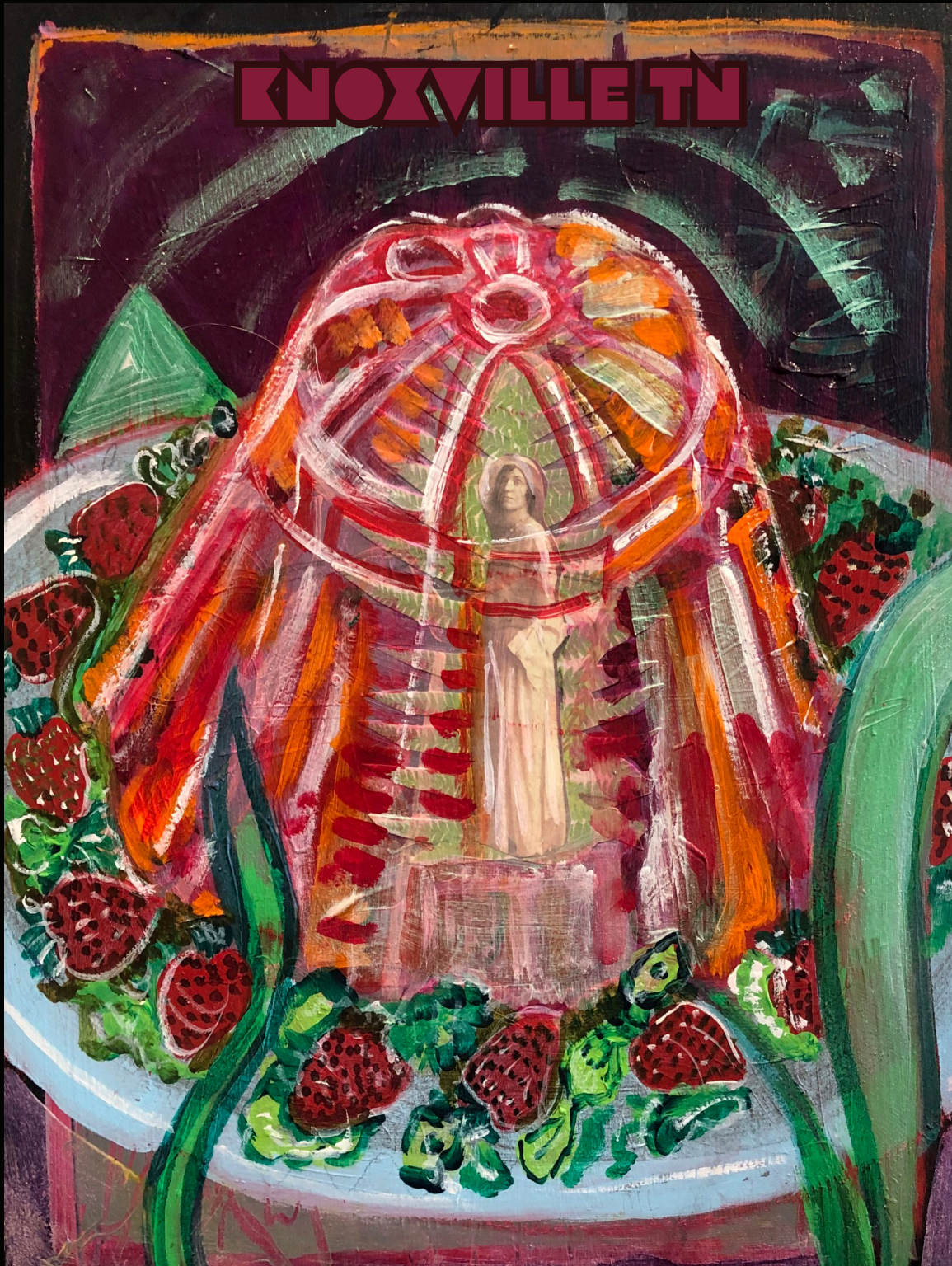




KNOXVILLE TN

THE FOOD ISSUE

NUMBER ONE, VOLUME ONE

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A MODERN FOOD HISTORY OF KNOXVILLE



Created by Sadie Kimbrough



Knoxville, a recipe -

My family raised me to pay attention to my food, to salt ingredients every step of the way, to finish my plate and always say 'thank you.' I never grew up with not enough, and I never considered it a possibility. I love to eat. For a long time, I thought everyone's experience with food was exactly that. I thought the history of food could be summarized by grandmothers' recipes and flow charts determining which crops are from the Old World and which ones from the New. But that's not the case. The history of food is a celebration of the human experience, a deepened understanding of our identities and connections to others. It reveals intricate webs of social, economic, and political forces that shape human society for evil and for good. It showcases the very worst of humanity, when we decide who gets to grow this and eat there and feed whom, and more importantly, when we decide who doesn't get to choose.

Until I began studying food systems and their impact on people and our planet, I thought sharing food could categorically bring people together. After all, we are taught as small children that the best way to overcome differences with adversaries is by breaking bread together. The first Thanksgiving went off without a hitch, right?

But the history of food is more than just sharing supper. People grow, cook, and eat, and people reap the consequences. Power dynamics arise. The server and customer do not stand on equal footing; nor do the farm owner and farm worker, the manufacturer and consumer, the parent and child. Simple conversations about food incite animosity. Should we eat animals? What if they're intelligent? Is inorganic produce safe to eat? What if the alternative is too expensive? Do Americans eat too much? Do you really need that extra piece of pie?

My short answer, at least to the last question, is yes. I'm a big believer in dissolving barriers to food. I'm a big believer in the possibility of food uniting people of all different backgrounds, but I know it's not that simple. To answer the question of whether food is a unifier or divider, I must clarify that food should not be personified. People do the feeding, eating, growing, and cooking. The better question is, do people use food as a tool for social integration or separation, both, or neither?

Food is an unsurprisingly broad topic. The answer will inevitably land in a gray area, but there is value in tackling the question in the first place. If we better understand the bad and the ugly, we may very well embrace the good. Knoxville increasingly entices "foodies," with new eateries popping out each month. But as we will explore, there is also a recent history of segregation at downtown luncheonettes and bars. The pandemic brought about a new-found romanticization of a de-urbanized, pastoral lifestyle, yet class politics limited Appalachian farmers' ability to feed their families less than a hundred years ago. How do we embrace our foodie future if we do not rectify and recognize past wrongdoings?

Every person has a unique and deeply personal relationship with their food. Taking a step back to understand historical significance helps us understand which ancestors, neighbors, friends, family members, and foes to thank (or curse) for our plates today. I live in Knoxville now, and I'm curious about my new home. How has food shaped the lives of 192,646 people and 82,586 households over 98.7 square miles? Do human decisions made about food pull Knoxvilleans closer together or further apart? There are no easy answers, but there are stories. The first is about moonshine.

HEAR THUNDER ROAD ROAR

Beyond the Mythology of Moonshine

*"Blazing right through Knoxville, out on Kingston Pike,
Then right outside of Bearden, they made the final strike.
He left the road at 90; that's all there is to say,
The devil got the moonshine and the mountain boy that day.*

*And then there was thunder, thunder over "Thunder Road,"
Thunder was his engine and white lightning was his load.
And there was moonshine, moonshine to quench the devil's thirst.
The law they never got him 'cause the devil got him first."*

- Robert Mitchum, *Thunder Road*, 1958

Knoxville got a moment to shine in the spotlight when Hollywood hotshot Robert Mitchum produced *Thunder Road* in 1958. Although the movie was shot a hundred miles east in Asheville, North Carolina, the opening theme brought attention to Knoxville's Kingston Pike, a segment of the infamous "Thunder Road."

The moonshine route's name refers to the roar of engines escaping the grasp of authorities. Thunder Road runs from Harlan, Kentucky to Knoxville, Tennessee. Legend has it that the movie's climax, when moonshine runner Lucas Droolin crashes his Ford coupe during an epic police chase, is based on a real Kingston crash. While many Knoxvilleans recount the tragedy, there's not much consensus on the details.

"People have grown up believing what someone told them when they were young," Knoxville local Alex Gabbard told *Knoxville News Sentinel* in 2012.¹ For years he tried to get to the bottom of the Thunder Road origin story, but like many others, ultimately failed to identify it. No newspaper stories, no records, no nothing. Mitchum died without revealing his inspiration.

"It's history," claimed Gabbard. "To those of us who grew up in that world, it doesn't seem like history because it doesn't seem like so long ago, but it is. Now it's giving way into legend."

In the decades following its premiere, cult classic *Thunder Road* held the United States in a tight grip. It took over movie drive-ins, themed roller coasters at Dollywood, and even inspired a young Bruce Springsteen to write a song of the same name. But what intrigued East Tennesseans was not just their shoutout in the theme song. *Thunder Road* told an all-too-familiar story of

mountain people evading (or attempting to evade) authorities in order to maintain self-reliance.

Moonshine is the name for untaxed and therefore illegal liquor. It's sometimes called "white lightning" or "mountain dew." Nowadays, the label is seemingly flexible. Check the shelves of any liquor store, and you might see clear whiskeys or neutral spirits labeled as moonshine. Don't be fooled. This is just a regular licensed commercial spirit being advertised with a folkloric name.

The practice of illicit liquor making has deep roots in the Appalachian region. When Scots-Irish settlers arrived in the mountains in the 1700s, they brought their whiskey-making skills. Small farmers with vast corn harvests found a profitable drink to concoct. They didn't call it "moonshine" then. The word's British origin refers to the tradition of sneakily concocting liquor in the nighttime, so it wasn't until distillers had reason to brew in secret that they used the infamous name.²

Appalachian farmers farther north in Western Pennsylvania launched a rebellion in 1791 when the federal government imposed an excise tax on whiskey. They "clung to whiskey as the stronghold of their households," writes historian Steven Stoll.³ They opposed the tax because it devalued their drink that previously functioned as an "irreplaceable source" of stability. Although the uprising mostly failed, a strong desire to independently control food commodities was established among mountain farmers.

Moonshine, *real* moonshine, is not legal. The home distillation of liquor is more complicated than wine or beer making because of the greater loss in tax revenue. Placing a tax on whiskey burdened Appalachian distillers by increasing the price for consumers and therefore lessening the demand.

Maybe this price increase wouldn't have been a problem, but money was not plentiful in the southern mountain economy at the end of the eighteenth century. Most families provided for themselves using forest resources; no need to interact with outside economies. Banks were distant, and the region mainly operated under a barter system. Landowners were already being taxed on their land and livestock. They "recoiled" at this unprecedented excise on one of the few goods that could earn them cash.⁴

This lack of cash flow did not cease to be a problem in the region. Outsiders continued to interfere with Appalachian life during the 1800s and 1900s, increasingly placing locals in a

state of dependency, whether with their landlord, the lumber or coal companies they worked for, or the taxes they loathed.⁵

And the taxes weren't the only problem. Temperance laws spread throughout the region like wildfire, eventually resulting in nationwide prohibition from 1920 to 1933. With this new crackdown on liquor, demand for moonshine hit an all time high. Secret stills popped up every which way. With alcohol cheap and always available, homemade creation and consumption rose dramatically.⁶

Participants in this illicit economy developed creative methods of hiding and transporting their merchandise. *The New York Herald* wrote in 1922 about Cumberland Mountain, Tennessee local George Neff, a notoriously crafty transporter, or bootlegger. "Nary a drop of liquor in this here car,"

George told the cops, who apparently pulled him over five times in one week. Later, to his friends, "Well, I didn't lie to 'em. The stuff wasn't in the car; it was under it." When the officers asked him about the 40-gallon jug suspended under his small car, he claimed it was "one of them new fangled gas tanks." George carried on his way.

The federal and local police struggled to contain the moonshine problem. Not only did mountain ingenuity stump them, but the geography of the region interfered too. "Mountaineers are as scattered as the hills are scattered," one officer told the *Herald*. "The moonshiner's game is a lone one."⁷

In reality, this usually wasn't the case. Distilling families, households, and neighbors, although sometimes in competition with one another, often formed organized resistance, working together to outwit their pursuers.

But this is not to say that moonshining communities were incredibly inclusive. In the 1890s the "white cap" club emerged in Wilkes County, Tennessee. This gang of moonshiners sought to protect each other from federal agents, "convinced that federal and local liquor laws threatened to destroy their livelihood." Loosely based on the organizational structure of the Ku Klux Klan, the white caps also terrorized local Blacks "in an attempt to maintain white supremacy." Black Appalachians did participate in moonshining, though, and had for a long time.⁸

Perhaps the most infamous moonshiner of Hancock County, Tennessee, Mahalia "Big Haley" Mullins was a mixed-race woman known for her lawlessness and enormous size. In 1899, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* published a story on one of the many unsuccessful arrests of Mahalia. When deputies found the felon in her Cumberland cabin, their seizure was interrupted by her young daughter, who whispered in her mother's ear, "I'll go tell the crowd," referring to Mahalia's other dozen children. Knowing they would be outnumbered, the officers withdrew.⁹

When Mahalia died in 1898, newspapers across the country gave nod to her legendary status. "Not too big for death," reported the *Asheville Citizen-Times*, claiming Mahalia was a "650 pound" mother of 18 who could not be captured by the police "on account of her size and the isolated location of her home."¹⁰ *Bridgeton Pioneer* wrote that there was "no way to get her down the mountain."¹¹

The story was clearly sensationalized, with many reporters even speculating that she had been murdered by neighbors envious of her successful moonshine business, which she took over after her husband died. "Was this great woman murdered?" asked the *Inquirer*. If so, the reporter predicted the mountains would "witness bloodshed" as "the tribe always avenges an injury to one of its members."¹² The use of "tribe" perpetuates an anti-Appalachian and frankly anti-Black narrative that paints the family as primitive and backward.

Stereotypes synonymous with Appalachia, like the rugged mountaineer or isolated hillbilly, are evident in moonshine discourse. According to the



Encyclopedia of Appalachia, the hillbilly image is a “lanky, black-bearded, white male who lives in a cabin in the mountains with an outhouse out back. He wears a battered slouch hat, totes a shotgun, and a jug of moonshine, and holds little regard for the law, work, cleanliness, or book learning.”¹³

The fountain drink Mountain Dew (have you made the connection yet?) drew from this mold for advertising campaigns for years. “Drink Mountain Dew,” they said. “It’ll tickle yore innards!” Mascot Willy the Hillbilly was always depicted with his trusty jug and tattered plaid ensemble. Willy served as comic relief, and he never wore shoes.

Despite the hyperbolized tales surrounding moonshine, its role as a regional commodity cannot be reduced to a story of drunken mountain folk running from the law. Moonshining represents resistance and rejection of laws not suited to meet the needs of the mountains. This idea garnered particular relevance after prohibition, as concerned Appalachians and Americans at-large questioned the stability of their civil liberties.¹⁴

As foreign entrepreneurs crept into the forest and mountain landscapes to make money off of the abundance of natural resources, the people of Appalachia did what they could to hold on to their subsistence. Even flying down Thunder Road, the moonshiner’s game was a serious one.

It Is A Pillow Mountain by Jesse McAdams *Phoenix, Spring 2018*



BLACKBERRY WINE

7 quarts blackberries, washed
7 pounds sugar
2 quarts water
1 egg white
3 1/2 quarts water

Add 3 1/2 quarts water to mashed berries and let stand 24 hours. Strain. Beat egg white, add sugar and 2 quarts water. Boil 5 minutes and skim; cool. Add syrup to juice, stir, and put in cloth-covered jar. Skim for 10 mornings, then cover with cloth and let stand until fermentation stops. Bottle.



Recipe from the Southern Appalachian Mountain Cookbook¹



Inheritance

Sophie Shelton

*Phoenix Literary Arts Magazine
Spring 2017*

Kudzu chokes the oak trees
here, the state park is dying
slowly. If Norris Dam broke
clean and the valley flooded,
I don't know who would
take the blame.

In high school, I muttered
Soon
I'll get out of this state for
college--
I was lying. Welcome
to Tennessee. I can count
the rings of my people in the
dead trees, our DNA is
in the dirt.

At the ramshackle museum
my
father lifted me, age
5 on his sawdust shoulders,
said, Your great grandpa built
that
clock, Sophie.
The way they talk about him--
director
of information at TVA! You'd
think he built the dam with his
two hands, that college-
educated sonofabitch.

I wish I could say more and
less of my family than
Welcome
to Tennessee
and Watch your step in the
creek,
Sophie, these crawdads aren't
gonna catch themselves.

THE REINVENTION OF THE NEW, OLD CITY

Trains, Tamales, Bustle, & Bulldozers

Every Friday night, the Old City is loud. Britney Spears and Outkast blast from the 2000s-themed Hannah's Bar. Art goes sprawl from the latest gallery opening at the Emporium. A chattering line of customers spills onto the sidewalk outside Davinci's Pizzeria.

A century ago, the Old City was likely even louder. The commotion of the railroad, farm animals at the stockyards, hollering street vendors, and rowdy bar fights achieved a racket that extended beyond weekend festivities.

"The bawling of cattle, neighing of horses, and squealing of pigs is being heard in increasing volume on Willow Street," reported the *Knoxville News Sentinel* in 1934. The Union Stockyard opened a few years prior, and Knoxville-llians were impressed with their city's growing status as a livestock supercenter.¹

Former Tennessee House Representative Robert Booker recalled seeing the spectacle as a child. "We couldn't resist stopping at the Union Stockyards to see the cattle in holding pens. It was the closest we'd ever come to being in the Old West that we saw in the cowboy movies."²

The nearby railroad centralized various food industries in the Old City in the late nineteenth century, although it wasn't called by that name quite yet. In the 1980s, developer Kristopher Kendrick saw an abandoned area of town and envisioned a bustling business district. Skeptical of his plans to revitalize, Kendrick's friend Patrick Roddy expressed, "Kris, that's the old city." Kendrick replied, "Pat, that's the perfect name." And so it was.³

A century before the name change, though, the area around Central and Jackson Avenues was a booming wholesale district. Merchants set up right against the freight yards to quickly load their goods in and out of freight cars. The Union Stockyard opened a few decades later, and farmers from all over East Tennessee sold their livestock. Coffee roasters, sugar growers, and produce dealers did the same.⁴

Trains also brought residents. Eastern European Jews, Italians, Greeks, and Chinese immigrants populated the area in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their businesses included sandwich shops, ice cream parlors, cafes, small-scale push carts, and saloons.

The sizable Irish community arrived in the 1850s to work on the railroad and stuck around until construction finished. Renowned Irishman Patrick Sullivan opened a saloon on the corner of Jackson and Central, eventually home to legends of shootouts between outlaws and the Knoxville police.⁵ Although Sullivan's Saloon and all other bars in the so-called "red-light district" were seized by a citywide prohibition in 1907, Sullivan's survived as an Italian ice cream parlor and eventually reopened as a saloon in 1988.⁶

Alcohol fueled the Old City's bad reputation in the early twentieth century. The general bustle of business and everyday life was exacerbated by the mayhem of drunkenness and violence. Knoxville-llians nicknamed Central Avenue "the Bowery" after a neighborhood in New York of similar status.⁷ By the time saloons were banned in 1907, there were more than ten on one block.⁸

Knoxville writer Cormac McCarthy wrote a dramatic scene of 1950s Central Avenue in his 1979 novel *Suttree*, where characters encountered "loud and shoddy commerce [erupting] out of the dim shops and into the streets and packs of scarred dogs [wandering] through the streets."⁹

In addition to general commotion, frequent flooding, disease, and meat packing houses made the area an "unpleasant place to live for those who could afford to live elsewhere," says historian of Knoxville Jack Neely.

Despite the Bowery's shoddy reputation in the late 1800s and early 1900s, a wide range of occupational niches were filled by laborers and entrepreneurs in the area. Neely asserts, "The people who worked in that area were pretty diverse from the lowest wage earners to some big shots, like globetrotting sometime mayor Peter Straub."

"I love the story of Italian immigrant Fiorenzo Rebori, who arrived here accidentally on the train in the 1880s, and spent the rest of his life selling peanuts to train passengers from a lean-to establishment by the library at Gay and Vine," says Neely. Rebori's peanut venture was so successful that he bought the library building in 1915, hence the now-named Rebori Building.

Although not many were so lucky as Rebori, other European immigrants went into food service. The first Greek to operate a food business was "Bob" Alexander, who did a brisk busi-

ness selling sandwiches and fish cakes from a lunch wagon on the corner of Vine and Central Avenues. Eventually, he returned to his homeland, but Alexander's success encouraged other Greeks to try their luck in East Tennessee.¹⁰

Today the Greek population in Knoxville is substantial. Every year St. George Orthodox Church's annual GreekFest brings Knoxvilleans together to celebrate Greek heritage with traditional dancing and honey-glazed baklava.

The Gold Sun opened in 1907, which became a "haven for young Greek men who wanted to learn the restaurant business in America." The restaurant served a Knoxville special: the "Full House" tamale, covered in chili and served with sal-tines."¹¹ Not a stuffed grape leaf, but a tamale. If this doesn't sound very Greek, it's because it wasn't.

40 years before Knoxville's first Mexican restaurant, tamales were a prominent dish. Outside of established brick and mortars, Black men popularized the husk-wrapped meal on their pushcarts in the Old City.

Hot tamales have lingered within Black southern culture for quite some time. Some scholars trace their existence to Mexican migrant laborers working the cotton harvest in the early twentieth century. Others believe tamale roots go back a century prior when US soldiers brought them home after serving in the Mexican-American War.

Historian Amy Evans claims the portable and heat-retentive tamale was a financial and nutritional "support system to rural communities" in the Mississippi Delta, which eventually spread to the rest of the South. Black field workers and sharecroppers recognized the basic ingredients: cornmeal and pork. Even without money for meat, families could replicate the taste with seasoning. This basic meal was "warm and hearty [and] could be easily transported to a cold cotton field."¹²

Greenville, Tennessee native Harry Royston first introduced the tamale to Knoxville following his stint as concession manager in the circus. He paraded through the streets shouting, "They're hot! Red hot! They're Harry's!"¹³ Eventually, Royston opened a storefront on Willow Avenue. When he died in 1917, the *News Sentinel* wrote of his "uniform courtesy, deference, and strict honesty" that won him respect as a Black businessman even in the age of Jim Crow.¹⁴

Another popular tamale business was Andrew's Hot Tamale Stand, which opened in 1919 and operated for about fifty years at various locations. Owner Andrew Taylor hawked tamales and hot dogs near the old Union Stockyard and around Jackson Avenue.

"On occasion we had a nickel to buy a hot dog or a dime for



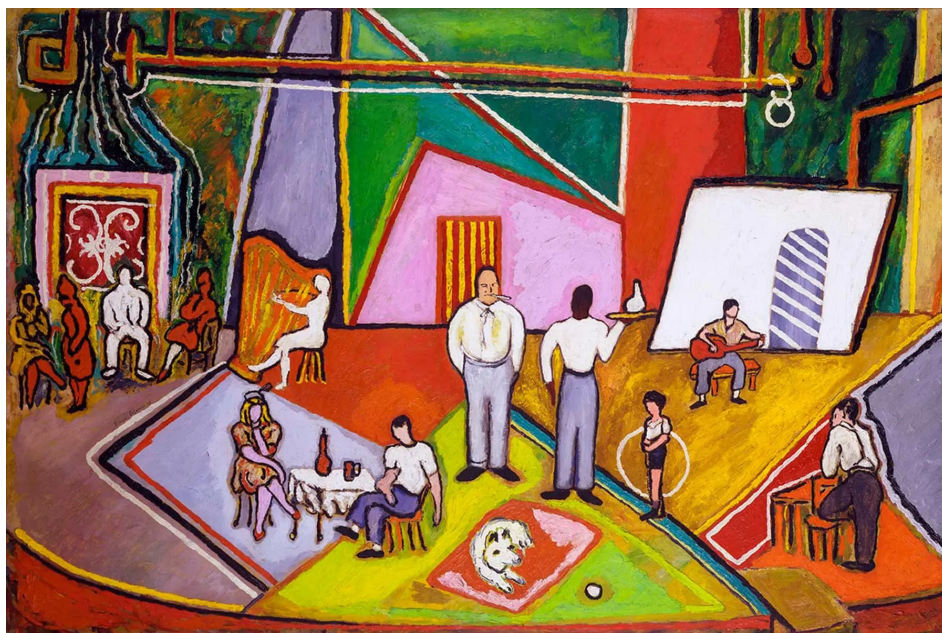
a hot tamale from Andrew's Hot Tamale Stand on Patton Street near Jackson Avenue, but those times were rare," Booker wrote his childhood in the '40s for the *News Sentinel*. "Our first national fast food outlet was still twenty years away."¹⁵

Black tamale culture was particularly important in the Old City because of the segregated restaurants and establishments in other parts of Knoxville. While Booker recalled his childhood exploring the downtown streets, he noted the exclusion he faced as a young Black boy.

"I loved the smell of candy and fresh popcorn as I passed the movie theaters—the Riviera, Strand and the Tennessee. I could not go into any of them, but they were Gay Street landmarks," he wrote. "I passed by the historic S&W Cafeteria but couldn't stop there, either."¹⁶

Much of Central Avenue served as a mixed-race commercial zone before other restaurants desegregated in 1963, likely due to the many street vendors and plentiful outdoor dining options. People of various classes and races ate the same food, even if they weren't sitting side by side. "Fondness for hot tamales is not condoned to one class," reported the *News Sentinel* in 1926, claiming even "dainty young girls of Knoxville" enjoyed a corn husk from time to time.¹⁷

The aptly nicknamed 'Big Biscuit' place served jumbo biscuits, thickly sliced country ham, gravy, eggs, and coffee at fifteen cents for both white and Black customers in the early 1900s. This is not to say breakfast goers were breaking



bread together, as they were separated by a thin partition and often monitored by police officers watching for violent behavior.¹⁸

Old City breakfasts may have thrust Knoxvilleians into the same physical spaces, but shared affinities for tasty meals were not enough to forge respectful relationships across racial boundaries. Even if these connections were achieved on a personal level, local policy did not reflect a desire to unify Old City eaters.

While individual Black entrepreneurs like Harry Royston and Andrew Taylor were complimented for their corn-husked comestibles by the local newspaper, city developers did not share the same praise for them or their communities. Urban renewal projects in the 1970s destroyed Andrew Taylor's constructed storefront on Willow Avenue.¹⁹ Many other sellers saw the same fate, and tamale culture slowly disappeared from the Old City.

Only a third of Black businesses in Knoxville survived urban renewal. The thriving downtown Black neighborhoods were mostly bulldozed between 1959 and 1974. Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 targeted minority communities in an effort to eliminate "urban blight" and substandard housing.²⁰

Black Knoxvilleians found themselves in what Booker called a triple whammy: "trying to find a new home, trying to find a new church and trying to build a new business." Many moved into public housing. Their former homes and businesses were not considered for historical preservation.²¹

This massive demolition erased a huge chunk of the

local customer base. Shopkeepers of every race were forced to sell or leave their stores empty. The Southern Railway brought its last passengers to Knoxville in 1970. The meatpacking factories and stockyards closed.²²

"Downtown was alive then," lamented James Peoulas, former employee of the Gold Sun, about the pre-renewal days. "Eventually, the people will come back. I just don't know if I'll live to see it or not."²³

In the early '80s, the area was bought up by developers and slowly transformed into Knoxville's modern nightlife scene. Coffee shops, boutiques, and clubs with live music filled the empty avenues and vacant buildings.

Although its former inhabitants live elsewhere, leaving room just for yuppies and retirees in luxury lofts and a substantial homeless population, the Old City has regained its hubbub since the late twentieth century development. The tamales are a bit more expensive and gentrified, but they're there. The link to the original Black vendors is mostly lost.

The transformation of the Old City questions how we quantify "togetherness." A public space does not necessarily constitute nor foster human connection. Food may bring people to the same room, but solid social relations go beyond appreciation for a meal.

However, for a city with a growing foodie population, the Old City is important. A Japanese ale house, upscale Greek tapas restaurant, hotdog shop, barbecue joint and other establishments make up a considerable array of choices for most budgets.

It's probably best to not reinstate the stockyards and saloon shootouts, but maintaining a reliably diverse palate for Knoxville eaters is crucial to a thriving city, not just in the Old City, but in every neighborhood where its founders now live.



THE CHINESE RESTAURANT INTERLUDE

Dallas Dim Sum

Kelly Moore

Phoenix, Spring 2019

At the turn of the twentieth century, Chinese restaurants reached unprecedented popularity in the United States. Middle and upper class white people were decidedly fascinated with Chinese culture, imagining it as both backward and exotic. The “chop suey” craze, which refers to a stir-fried meat and vegetable dish catered to the American palate, took the country by storm.¹ The *Knoxville Journal* even admitted in 1946 that chop suey was “as native to America as deep-dish apple pie.”²

Knoxville’s first Chinese restaurant, the Pagoda, opened next to the Bijou Theater on Gay Street in 1934. It offered two extensive menus, one American and one Chinese. Customers could enjoy candied yams, oysters, chow mein, sandwiches, seafood chop suey, spaghetti, Boston cream pie, or even choose one of four toast variations. The Pagoda was owned by a presumably white man named Max Weinstein.³

Knoxville has received small waves of Chinese immigrants since the 1880s, despite policies like the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, designed to keep Chinese people from entering the United States.⁴ These racist restrictions occurred simultaneously with the craze for Chinese food, demonstrating an ironic and unfortunate preference for what people can provide, not the people themselves. Even apart from taste, Chinese food gained popularity for its social services: low prices, convenience, and long hours of operation. Chop suey was the “Big Mac of the pre-McDonald’s era.”⁵

An American affinity for Chinese-American food remains today. Restaurateur David Chang delves into discussions of authenticity and folklore in the “Fried Rice” episode of his Netflix series, *Ugly Delicious*. During a visit to Knoxville, he stopped by New China Palace near Oak Ridge. Owner Chen P. Ren explains that his cuisine is all-American Chinese. “If I make 100% Chinese [food]...no business,” he claims. It’s why his menu offers General Tso’s chicken, not traditional Sichuan boiled fish. He’ll make an exception if Chinese Knoxvilleans request an authentic dish: “If some Chinese want Chinese food, of course I have to do it.”⁶

Chang heard a different perspective at Asia Kitchen, located on Kingston Pike. Liye Sang, the owner’s son, brought him a bit of everything to try. Despite Chang’s Asian background, he was suspicious of the dish sitting before him. “You’re telling me people eat this,” he said, poking at his plate. “A lot,” Sang replied with a smile. “I can tell you we do stuff with more intestines than our gourmet noodles.” As for Americanized Chinese food like lo mein, egg rolls, or Kung Pao? “If that’s what you’re looking for, you’re in the wrong place.”⁷

Food is a common signifier of identity. When immigrants come to the United States, they recreate their cultural spaces as best as they can, often by opening restaurants.⁸ But when Chinese cuisine is Americanized beyond recognition into chop suey, the ability to uphold tradition in a new place becomes increasingly difficult. Places like Asia Kitchen, rare as they are, serve as cultural ambassadors in cities like Knoxville that seemingly disregard authentic fare.



SUMMER OF '60 SIT-INS

Inspired by students challenging racial segregation in Greensboro, North Carolina, Black students at Knoxville College descended upon downtown lunch counters and soda fountains in May 1960. They saw what community-led action could accomplish, and sought to break racial barriers that disallowed Black Knoxvilleans from patronizing the 'whites-only' restaurants. Student leader Robert Booker recalled the policy of a local McDonald's: "We don't serve mustard, ketchup, or Negroes."¹

The Knoxville sit-ins looked different from those happening in other southern cities for a couple of reasons. They were brief, relatively peaceful, and supported by several city leaders, including the mayor.²

To supplement the many student protestors who went home for the summer, local ministers, doctors, homemakers, and older professionals stepped in. The demonstrations were nonviolent. One of the only bouts of brutality was instigated by white youth, yet still downtown merchants and local media blamed protestors for "stirring up animosity and setting race relations back a thousand years."³

"The sooner the demonstrations are abandoned," wrote the *News Sentinel* on July 1st, "the quicker the cause of racial parity will win support."⁴ This assessment immediately received backlash. "This is 1960," said local Black educator Mrs. Sammie J. Wynn in her letter to the editor five days later. "The Negro has waited since 1865 for the 'cause of racial parity to win support.' Even you will admit that is long enough."⁵

The newspaper's misguided attitude reflected that of many white and Black residents who, before the sit-ins, thought of their city as a realm of racial leniency. Historian Cynthia Griggs Fleming claims that Appalachia's mountainous terrain led to a less-obvious history of slavery that prevented "generations of Blacks from having an open confrontation with the face of their segregated lives," leaving them passive but still dissatisfied.⁶

For decades, Black political influence was "effectively neutralized" by paternalistic tradition that plagued Appalachia. Some local Black leaders seemed to have a foot in both worlds, eating breakfast with local politicians for photo ops, distracted from actual adversities facing their communities. "I felt [Black leaders] were too tied in with the power structure of the city to

be honest about it," said student demonstrator Jerry Pate.⁷

These leaders were part of an emerging Black elite class that personally benefited from their white connections in positions of power. But Jim Crow did not sneak past others, and many Black Knoxvilleans were well aware of the racial injustices at play. The lunch counter demonstrations were a direct result of this frustration.

The sit-ins, although short-lived, were a turning point for Black leadership. Black and white Knoxvilleans mostly lived in separate spheres, and downtown merchants were drawing a clear line between them. When protestors downright refused to be refused, it was made clear that racial leniency was not present in Knoxville. Friendliness among city leaders did not equate to a unified society.

Concerned that the demonstrations weren't doing enough, community members organized an economic boycott in late June. The "Stay Away From Downtown" campaign revealed restlessness. Those who refused to comply heard their name read aloud in church each week.⁸

By mid-July, several downtown merchants announced plans to desegregate. Racism certainly did not come to a halt in Knoxville, but the sit-ins served as a moment of unity among the Black community in Knoxville.⁹ "At least for a time," said Griggs Fleming, "even the most conservative Knoxville Blacks could no longer hide from the truth."

Some demonstrators were disappointed by the results of the sit-ins. "I waited all this damn time and this is what it's like," complained Avon Rollins. "All this bland food."¹⁰



"Marchers demonstrate against segregated lunch counters," *Knoxville News Sentinel*, June 27, 1960.

Ode To A Lunch Counter

Little lunch counter with your many stools,
And your nervous pacing manager fools;
How do you feel amid this confusion and strife?
Do you object to a change inevitable in life?

What's your stand in this crucial matter?
Little lunch counter with your top full of salt and often sticky,
Many of your managers are not getting tricky;
They close the door in haste and despair
As soon as some citizens make an appearance there.

What's your stand in this crucial matter?
What's the solution little roach ridden creature?
What kind of ideas do you have to feature?
Do you suggest that we stand as we patronize?
I'm sure if we did our troubles would be few.



What's your stand in this crucial matter?
If you could only speak and tell us what you have in mind,
It's almost certain that your suggestion would not be unkind.
"The trouble," I'm sure you'd say, "certainly is not my fault,
And this stupid mess should be brought to a screeching halt."

Robert Booker



"Civil rights protestor is carried from the Tennessee Theatre,"
Knoxville News Sentinel, May 11, 1963.



Untitled Crush
Zoe Brewster-Pennings
Phoenix, Spring 2021

FEEDING THE FAIR

The Other Side of the Spectacle

As Knoxville prepared to host the 1982 World's Fair, the *Wall Street Journal* made clear its doubts about the "scruffy little city on the Tennessee River." The big-city newspaper asked its readership in 1980: "what if you gave a World's Fair and nobody came?"¹

The *WSJ*'s sneering apprehension was proved wrong when over eleven million guests showed up to the event, also called the Knoxville International Energy Exposition, to celebrate social, technological, and culinary achievements from all around the world.

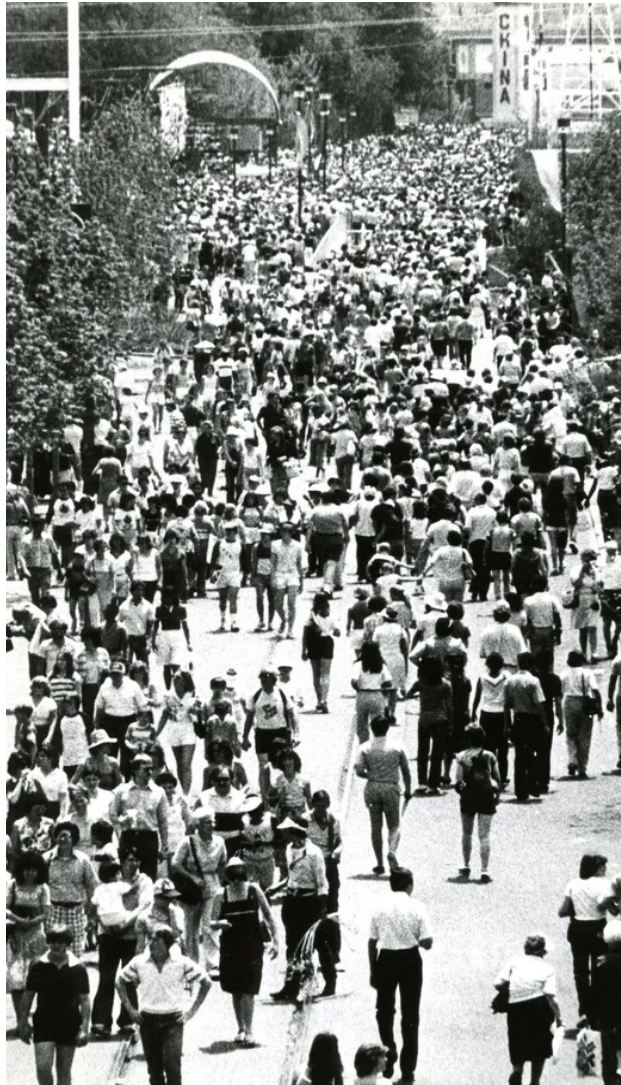
"A hundred thousand square feet of dining space devoted to culinary commercialism, the World's Fair in Knoxville is a devil's dance of culinary America," reported Phyllis C. Richman for *The Washington Post* in late May. "And crowds are standing in line for hours to sample it."²

By the second week, the Mexico Pavilion restaurant ran out of food. The Kuntry Kitchen sold its chicken in just 30 minutes each day. Lines everywhere doubled on themselves.³

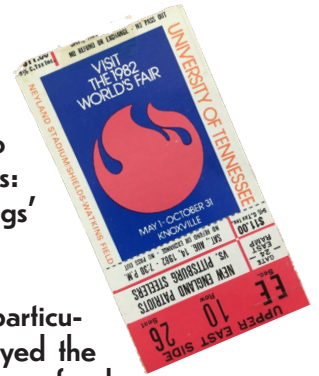
Where the fair food succeeded was not necessarily the international cuisine, but the Tennessee staples. The biscuits, coleslaw, and "sweet-en-it-yourself" tea were far simpler than stuffed crab or Hungarian rabbit paprikash, but they were authentic and enjoyable.

"Now, chitlins are a very emotional subject," folklorist Mary Hufford told the *Post* at the Folkways Food Exhibit, where visitors could watch her demonstrate country cooking. She referred to the Southern dish of

chitterlings, the large intestines of pigs, which require extra time and care to prepare for eating. The week's lessons: "barbecued neck bones, pickled pigs' feet, groundhogs."⁴



"A crowd of fairgoers at the World's Fair,"
Knoxville News-Sentinel, May 1982.



Visitors particularly enjoyed the grassroots food options. In August of 1982 *The Newburgh Register* called the Folkways Exhibit one of the more "exotic" attractions at the fair, enticing readers with potential of catching a "moonshine man deep in discussion with a cornshuck dollmaker" if they attend.⁵

Needless to say, out-of-towners were stuffed. The same could not be said for many Knoxvilleans, who, burdened by soaring prices at the grocery store, were experiencing a full-on food crisis. Despite hosting one of the biggest parties in the history of the American South, city residents could hardly afford the high cost of attendance.

Nationwide economic recession and international debt crises arrived at the worst possible time. Between 1973 and 1985, basic housing and utility costs increased by more than 160%, burdening families of color twice as much as their white counterparts.⁶

Early '80s farmers, encouraged by the agricultural industry, took on hefty amounts of debt to make their farms as big as they could be. As a result, interest rates rose and land values declined. For consumers, this meant a surge in food prices. A simultaneous rise in unemployment and stagnation of demand led to a phenomenon known as "stagflation," meaning the economy took a serious nose-dive.

"During the last four years is the first time I had heard of old people having to eat cat food," a concerned citizen wrote to the *News Sentinel* in 1980.⁷ Whether or not this disturbing imagery was truly a trend, older residents did have trouble accessing affordable food during this time in Knoxville.

Hattie Johnson, a 60-year old woman living in the Lonsdale Housing Development and disabled by a heart condition, lacked a supermarket in her neighborhood. Every two weeks, she boarded a bus and traveled five miles to shop for groceries. "On a limited income," the local newspaper reported on her situation in 1981, "she pays more for her groceries than Knoxville-
lians who live in the suburbs."⁸

American hunger and malnutrition were not only prevalent but undergoing a radical shift, presenting itself in the late '70s as reliance on processed and packaged prepared foods. Not only did poor folks live in food deserts where affordable food was not available nearby, but they found themselves increasingly surrounded by convenience foods and sugary drinks in both urban and rural markets.⁹

Impoverishment began to translate into obesity rather than the traditional image of an underfed person. This shift in the presentation of food insecurity heightened doubts about a legitimate need for welfare in the United States.

A frustrated journalist at the *News Sentinel* called for a stricter definition of poverty so that food stamps wouldn't get so "out of control." They wrote that "welfare has become a 'growth industry' in America," and nothing illustrates that better than the Federal food stamp program." While the poverty line in 1980 was officially \$7,150 a year for a family of four, they complained that a family could "in fact, have a gross income as high as \$11,412 and still receive food stamps."¹⁰ By the way, a gross income of \$11,000 supporting a family of four in 1980 is equivalent to about \$41,000 today.¹¹

Conservative fear of food stamp domination led to President Reagan announcing a new plan in 1981: people abusing "loophole-ridden" financial food assistance would be denied eligibility.¹²

"This is a slap in the face to the poor people," Knoxville

Charles Poppelbaum wrote in a letter to the *News Sentinel* editor in 1981 regarding the President's decision. "I, like a lot of other poor people, work hard and the cost of groceries is so high that the small amount of food stamps I get helps to keep us from starving."¹³

"I also saw on television where Reagan gave a big dinner for all the senators and Representatives who make money [from the food industry] and are not like the poor people who have to work for low wages and have to struggle to make ends meet," Poppelbaum argued. "His dinner party cost \$200,000."¹⁴

Knoxville's upcoming dinner party was no picnic either. When the 1982 World's Fair was all said and done, the world moved on. While tourists enjoyed regional delicacies, marveled at new inventions, consorted with interesting and worldly people, and then returned home, Knoxville accumulated \$46 million in debt.¹⁵

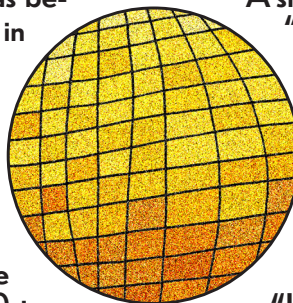
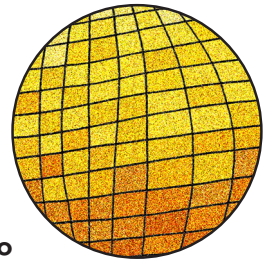
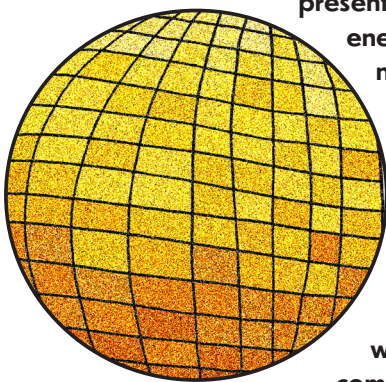
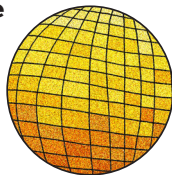
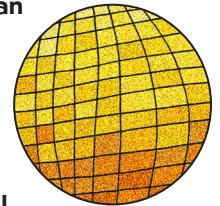
10 years later, the *News Sentinel* summed up the residential sentiment of the time: "It is our fair to remember warmly as a once-in-a-lifetime experience or to grit our teeth over because of the debt the city will owe well into the first decade of the next century."¹⁶

This is not to say that the decision to host was a mistake. Fair promoters initially promised city residents that the fair would bring commerce, global recognition, housing, and even a brand new transit system to town. It seemed like a good deal. They also argued that the fair would cost citizens nothing. This was a lie.¹⁷

A small group of non-community members, AKA "development-minded" bankers, developers, and lawyers, set the World's Fair agenda. They "cajoled, persuaded, and eventually forced" the Knoxville community to pay for the fair with city and private funds.¹⁸

Community members voiced their anxieties, which were plainly ignored by fair planners. "It concerns me that we will spend millions on the fair, while neglecting our schools, libraries, policemen, and firemen," wrote Robert Booker for the *News Sentinel* in August of 1981. "And whoever heard of a 'temporary' sales tax?"¹⁹

Similar to the nationwide dilemma occurring within the agricultural sector, Knoxville took on hefty amounts of debt hoping to prove that "long-term revitalization followed



short-term economic projects."²⁰ Wishful thinking.

So the scruffy little city on the Tennessee River almost succeeded. The problem was not a lack of attendance; people came from far and wide to pack the city to full capacity. Unfortunately, though, Knoxvilleians paid the hefty price of festivities with little return.

Once again, physical proximity does not equate to intimacy. Perhaps attendees took a liking to other folks in the crowd, found friends, or connected with food sellers peddling barbecue and pickled feet. But Knoxvilleians were more removed from the shindig than I, at least, initially believed.

Sure, World's Fair mugs and t-shirts plague every thrift store within a ten mile radius, and the Sunsphere stands tall as a symbol of environmental, architectural something or another... but what was intended as a symposium of global fellowship seemed to exclude the very people that made it happen.



"The Sunsphere Towering High Above The U.S. And Other Pavilions," Joe Haupt.

Vols, what's on your gameday menu?

"Vodka and toast."



"Lots of alcohol. Hardcore pregameing. At the game, maybe more beer and nachos."

"A hot dog at Neyland."

"Cheerios."

"Beer, hot dogs, popcorn."

"A drink called an Orang-a-Tang: vodka, dash of PGA, orange soda, crushed ice like an icee."



"Gus's cheese bings, and any other form of fried cheese."

"Just enough to hold the alcohol down. Most likely half a sandwich."



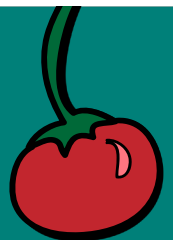
"Gator jambalaya on Florida weekend. All the bread."



"It used to just be a bunch of Miller Lite."

MOUNTAIN STEW

1 stewing chicken	2 cups tomatoes
2 cups diced potatoes	1 tbsp. butter
2 cups sliced onions	1/2 tbsp. salt, pepper
2 cups corn	1 cup bread crumbs
2 cups butterbeans	



(Squirrel or rabbit is excellent in place of the chicken.) Stew meat until tender. Remove bones. Add vegetables to meat, seasonings; cook until vegetables are done. Add butter and bread crumbs to thicken. Serve hot. (Add water as necessary.)

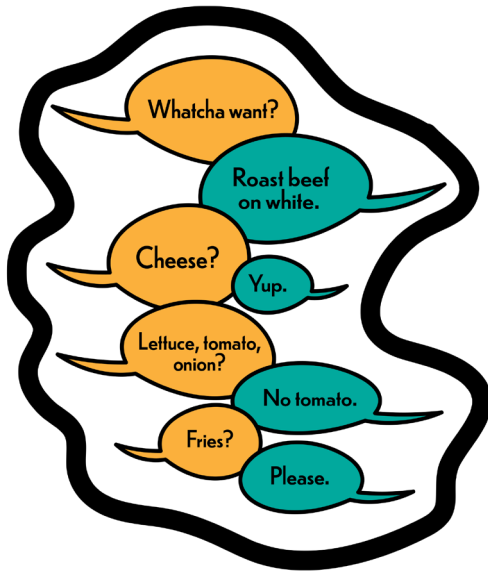
Recipe from the Southern Appalachian Mountain Cookbook¹

FAST TIMES AT GUS'S GOOD TIMES DELI



At twenty years old, Aaron Hale started his first restaurant job. "I was just a kid when I started delivery. This is my thirtieth year." I congratulated him. "Thanks, I guess," he chuckled.¹

In 1981 Gus Captain opened Gus's Good Times Deli off Cumberland Avenue, the trafficky road filled to the brim with bars, fast food, and smoke shops, otherwise known as "the Strip." Kids living on campus and within the student-populated neighborhood Fort Sanders were his main customer base, and Captain needed someone to deliver Philly cheesesteaks and shoestring fries at any hour of the night.



"It was '93. I didn't know campus at all," remembers Hale. "No GPS. Just driving around the dark ass Fort, trying to figure out where I was going. I stopped at frat houses, no cell-phone, just wandering around asking drunk kids and frat boys, 'Is this plate of food supposed to be for you?'"

Nowadays he's the expert on all things Gus's. When Captain retired in 2002, Hale and his business partner Gerald Nelson took over. Now he works alongside family and "basically family," including his brother at the fry station and his wife who runs the Facebook.

"I could predict about 60% of people's food when they walk in," Hale boasts, and he does (like clockwork, "Ah, here's my smoked cheddar guy.") He knows his regulars well, as Gus's is one of the last local places left on the Strip. "There used to be a soul to Cumberland and the college. Now it's just another interstate exit. Everyone else is gone. It's just us now."

Other buildings on the Strip are being sold to developers and the university to create luxury high-rise apartments and parking garages. Captain's family owns the building, so Hale doesn't think they'll go anywhere but suspects "if someone offered 'em \$50 million they'd have to."

Though Gus's sports a bright orange awning and plasters newspapers with football highlights all over the walls, love from the University of Tennessee is minimal. "They don't care if anyone else is here. None of this [development] is geared for small businesses to make it."

Hale complains about the school's lack of support for Gus's because he believes the relationship is imbalanced. "We're a part of game day. We got people in line all the way to Cumberland Avenue. I wouldn't do it, but they do," he laughs. "It's a part of the season, I suppose."

The fall semester is the busiest season for the deli. "Everyone's heard of Gus's, so they gotta try it. The parents bring the freshmen here, alumni come back to visit, and all these different generations come with each other. It's nice," says Hale.

Situated right across the street from dorm buildings and fraternity houses, Gus's is a staple for students living on campus. As a pillar of football game day tradition, the whole place is basically a free advertisement for the university.

The deli's in a tricky situation. Hale clearly carries overwhelming frustration with the university for overlooking small businesses along the Strip. But he also greatly benefits from the association. Stopping for a sandwich is practically an official activity for incoming freshmen during welcome week. Those that keep coming are typically students or alumni. Despite a weak relationship with the school, all of Gus's regular customers sport orange and white on the regular.

So when COVID-19 hit the world in March of 2020 and students left for their never-ending spring break, Hale was justifiably fearful. "Not just for us, but for everybody."

Apart from a UT Vol Shop tweet that read "Check in with your friends!" and tagged the deli, Hale claims the university was no help in the early days of the pandemic. "They don't even want us here," he says begrudgingly.

But Gus's loyal fanbase of Tennessee football fans pulled through. Hale says of the support they received, "It was just awesome. We had to be willing to change it up, because burgers and fries couldn't feed anyone that wasn't here. We sold Gus's seasoning, shipping all over the place. People started ordering tons of shirts. I spent whole days at the post office."

They expanded their delivery routes to reach more folks around the city. A plea to Instagram on April 4th read, "We have been here for 39 years and are hoping desperately to see 40." The very next day, Hale's wife wrote, "Y'all. Seriously. We are down to TWO boxes of fries!"

Hale credits the customers for the deli's endurance and survival during those early days of pandemic. "There's just so many people that love it here, being here this long. We're grateful."

Butter

The Enchanters + Costume Party

Sara Marie Miller

Phoenix Literary Arts Magazine, Fall 2009

I am my mama's daughter
biscuit's butter, calf moon wailer
textile honey, low-life
low-life

"Your work
I like your work,
it's your person
I can't stand."

Can't tolerate
that kind of stuff
that kind of
pinch and tickle
wink and wiggle
mama's taste
for honey & meat
biscuit butter
welling up in the crack
running down the
spread of thighs

the shame of it
all of it.

I come with all of it,
all my parts
sex
blood
shit
and rage.

Honey & meat.
Butter. Butter.



Dorothy Allison

LGBTQ Fiction and Poetry from Appalachia¹

SAVING A SEAT AT THE BAR

The Right to Eat, Drink, & Gather

The LGBTQ+ community, in Knoxville and most everywhere, often mingles in privately owned spaces where alcohol is served. Historically there are few faith, family or food-centered public venues in which queer people have had uncontested seats at the table, particularly in the South. Small “mom-and-mom” and “pop-and-pop” bars bridge the gap.¹

While we know these bars and clubs have a significant place in queer history, seeking out reliable and objective media coverage from the twentieth century is no easy feat. Often misrepresented in mainstream publications, marginalized groups like queer Tennesseans rely on community-driven archives to learn about their past.

One of these repositories is the *Voices Out Loud Project*, which preserves and shares interviews with East Tennesseans that identify as LGBTQ+. While local newspapers have failed to provide trustworthy accounts of the gay bar scene in Knoxville, these archives capture what really matters: first-hand experience.

Mississippi-born Ed White arrived in East Tennessee for school in 1979, and he pretty much never left. He recalls his first Knoxville Pride at the Candy Factory, a gritty dance club that was located in the back of Fort Sanders.

“It just felt like we were hiding, huddled in this underground,” White says in 2017, reminded of the bewilderment he felt looking at the club walls, covered with photographs from parties and drag shows at other Knoxville bars. “I was kind of amazed. I had no idea.”²

He wasn’t alone in his unfamiliarity. Most gay bars in the city, like Circle J, the Hideaway, and Zodiac (just to name a few), operated covertly throughout the twentieth century. Homophobic pathologies suggesting these places were “dangerous, out-of-control” centers of binge drinking and “immoral” activity drove them underground.³

During White’s time in a UT fraternity, pledges swung by the Carousel at the corner of James Agee and White Avenue, one of the more well-known gay bars in Knoxville’s history, for brownie points during their initiation process. The straight frat boys needed proof of their stunt, like a bartender’s signature on a napkin or even pledges’ private parts, further instilling the notion in these young Knoxvilleans that visiting a gay bar is a gay in itself.

What White didn’t yet realize as a closeted college kid

was that the Carousel served as a community hub that brought queer people together from 1972 to 2013. From the moment of its inception, the club was incredibly popular, often operating at ‘standing room only,’ particularly during drag shows. Young people flocked to the Carousel, dancing to disco until the sun rose.⁴

“The Carousel was the first gay establishment [in Knoxville] licensed to serve a complete menu of alcoholic beverages, including beer, wine, and mixed drinks,” claims former bouncer Samuel Lowe, who runs a Facebook page dedicated to preserving memories of the now-closed dance club. “The Carousel remained open and pouring until 3 A.M. It soon became the place where folks would wind up partying at the end of the night.”⁵

“It’s kind of sad the Carousel is gone,” White laments. After coming out in the late ‘80s, he became an activist and organizer for Knoxville’s queer community. “It just seemed like it was always going to be there. It was almost like our Stonewall in a way,” he laughs. “It’s where a lot of the plots were laid.”⁶

The Stonewall Inn, a popular New York gay bar, became an iconic symbol of resistance following an uprising against a police raid in 1969. The cops harassed patrons and arrested employees for selling liquor without a license, which was nearly impossible to acquire because they were so often revoked by the health department or law enforcement.⁷ In fact, the Carousel’s liquor license was a major reason for its success.

The Stonewall riots, which came to an end after three days of unrest, catalyzed widely recognized international gay and transgender liberation movements. It galvanized millions of Americans to see harassment in social spaces like Stonewall as a “denial of [queer peoples’] basic right to associate,” a pillar of the First Amendment and American democracy at large.⁸

“There’s this mistaken belief that [queer people] mainly go out to hook up,” says sociologist Gregg Mattson. “We go out mainly to be with friends, to see what’s going on, to escape our room, to not be physically alone even if we’re still technically lonely.”⁹

Gay bars are essential to the social and cultural history of queer people. They are not a modern phenomenon; they’re usually just secretive. And in Appalachia, even more so.¹⁰

Southern, rural, and mountain queer experiences are innately clandestine because of assumptions that queer people escape to “more liberal ‘gay meccas’ in urban and metropolitan areas,” writes Appalachian queer archivist Rachel Garringer.¹¹ “Young people in the mountains are often encouraged to leave or escape, whether they are queer or not. Educational opportunities, jobs, clean water, and possibilities all beckon from flatter lands outside the jagged borders of our states.”¹²

Queer people in Appalachia find themselves stuck with limited choices: either they stay and face homophobic conservatism at home, or they leave for progressive spaces and risk dismissal by disdainful urbanites. As writer Jeff Mann puts it, one might “see the oppression that Appalachians and homosexuals have in common...when you start to count all the queer jokes and hillbilly jokes.”¹³

There’s no easy way to generalize a narrative for the queer experience in Knoxville. It’s the reason community archives are wholly more effective as historical evidence than newspaper accounts by straight journalists.

Queer Knoxvilleians “have our own unique history,” says Gary Elgin, host of web-based talk show *The Lavender Table*. “Knoxville is a tremendous city. It has given me so much and been so welcoming.”¹⁴

For years, Elgin posted oral histories on YouTube where he interviewed friends and neighbors, usually over drinks or dinner. “We have to preserve what we can,” he says. “If we don’t preserve it, how do we learn? How do we not make the same mistakes? You know, there’s something to be said about tipping our hats to those who came before us.”¹⁵

The legacy of gay bars maintained a need for gathering places designated for the LGBTQ+ community in Knoxville. SouthPress, a colorful coffee shop on Chapman Highway, is one of these spots.

Owner Joslynn Fish came to Knoxville from rural Tennessee as a teenager, seeking anonymity and

the freedom to be authentic. “I came to Knoxville because, by comparison to where I’m from, it was the big city. I came to Knoxville to find identity, free of the opinion of others. I felt more than that. I felt community.”¹⁶

Upon her arrival to the city, the queer community gave sanctuary to Fish, whose first job in town was slinging plates at Cracker Barrel for \$2.13 an hour. Although she was too young to enter the Carousel, her elders often noticed her lingering outside.

“By the end of the night, they would buy me a basket of french fries,” she says. “I don’t think they knew at the time that was perhaps the only sustenance I had that day. If they hadn’t fed me, I wouldn’t have eaten.”

Her experiences fueled a desire to eventually build a safe space for queer people in Knoxville, particularly one that did not center around alcohol.

“I guess I could have said, ‘Wow! The Knoxville community really deserves a social, sober, queer space. Somebody should do that.’ Instead, I said, ‘Knoxville is really deserving of a social, sober, queer space. What can I do with my pool of retirement?’”



“South Press owner Joslynn Fish”
Knoxville News Sentinel, September 24, 2020.

Seventeen years of Cracker Barrel retirement funds transformed an old tax office on Chapman Highway into SouthPress in 2020, which eventually expanded into a vibrantly embellished 2,500 square foot space to accommodate patrons, drag performances, and local artist showcases. She completed much of the initial construction herself.

With a supportive community in her corner, Fish claims the title of first publicly open trans person in East Tennessee to own a business. “What makes this place

work, what makes this a hub, are the people that fill it,” she says humbly. “If people didn’t come here to meet friends or seek camaraderie and friendship, it would just be a pretty room. I cannot take the credit for that.”

Establishments like the Carousel and SouthPress prove that spaces designated for eating, drinking, and fraternization authentically bring people together. If Knoxvilleians face denial by neighbors or family, spaces for sharing meals and experiences are an investment in well being.¹⁷ Even when remedy for hardship is not necessary, public spaces made specifically for a largely unsung group of people are.

Gathering Green Tomatoes in the Rain

Anyone who knows me knows
I've waited years for this--
sleeping late on Sundays with a man
so kind I'm suspicious, as I was

all over Ireland, where the solitude
of strangers made me fear a mugging
waited around the corner of each hospitable
word. I curl for hours against your back,

its soft larch-bough wings of fur,
I curl into the rain's incessant, that first
steady autumn rain, summer's sodden
funeral. Almost noon when we rise.

"Fried-green-tomato weather,"
I announce, that southern delicacy
I have promised you for weeks.
"Are they breakfast food?" you wonder,

and now we are huddled together
by your stoop-side garden, beneath your cathedral-arch
umbrella, temporary oasis of dry

feeling the hemisphere slope its slow
day-by-day away from the light.
I am bending and cupping firm
unripe jade stippled with storm,

retreating to the kitchen, slicing them,
coring out the tough bit of pithy white.
"The secret ingredient," I announce,
hillbilly hierophant, taking down

the sugar bowl, mixing that touch
of sweet with cornmeal, salt, pepper
heating up the sine que non of
southern cooking, bacon grease,

easing the dusted tomatoes in,
Frying the coating a crackling
gold brown. Perfect with Tabasco,
with the mozzarella-and-fresh-basil

omelette you dry up, the melon
you slice. Grinning, we gobble
every bite. All the years
before--giving, giving, gifts

to those who could not care,
would not give back.
How well we make a feast together.
Those years of waste are over.

Jeff Mann
Loving Mountains, Loving Men¹



Dreamweave by Zoe Evans Phoenix, Spring 2021

From **Queering the Map**, an online geographic
database for sharing anonymous queer feelings
at any place, any time:

Near the south bank of the Tennessee River,
"I truly became Tony."

In Sorority Village,
"Came out while living in a sorority house."

On Gay Street,
"I attended my first pride here. I cried as it really sunk in
that I wasn't alone for the very first time."

Off West Jackson Avenue,
"First date--frozen banana stand--long walk--long
talk--stick shift lesson."

On the corner of White and James Agee,
AKA the Carousel,
"First place I safely explored my gender-queer self in
the mid-1980s--appearing and performing in drag."

GIRLS GOTTA EAT GOOD



Self-proclaimed “military brat” Jessica Carr was born and raised all over the South, from South Carolina to Louisiana to eventually landing in East Tennessee. “I grew up with a really nice melting pot of food in my home,” she says, crediting not only these many places, but also her Filipina mother and Tennessean father for the fusion.¹

From a young age, though, she found herself caught between her two backgrounds, as if they were separate from what she knew as a singular and complete identity. “I’ve never been to the Philippines. I’ve never been to Asia,” Carr remarks. “I’m, like, Southern Appalachia Asian, but people walk up and think I’m fresh off the boat or something.”

“Growing up in the South, people knew that you had some sort of ‘flavor’ to you, but they didn’t really know how to ask. Sometimes you don’t feel Asian enough but you also don’t feel white enough sometimes. It’s kind of an interesting space to be.”

She remembers the “smelly” foods her mom packed in her lunchbox. “She packed me curry one time, and it was green. All the kids were laughing at me, ‘Your chicken is rotten!’” I told my mom, and she packed me an extra one and was like, ‘Let them taste it. They don’t know what it tastes like and that’s why they’re making fun of you.’ Like, really? I brought it, let them taste it, and they loved it. They left me alone after that.”

“That’s the key to it,” Carr asserts. “People are afraid of things they don’t understand.” She didn’t know at the time, but this lesson would form the basis of her bakery’s business model eventually.

After attending high school in Maryville and studying journalism at UT, Carr began her marketing career. She lost her job in 2020 during the early days of the pandemic. In those days stuck indoors, she longed for the Filipino desserts from her childhood. Over FaceTime, her mother taught her everything she knew.

Like most everyone trying their hand at baking during quarantine, Carr posted her treats on Instagram, as well as her food blog, “Girls Gotta Eat Good.” She received DMs practically begging her to sell boxes of her goodies, so she did.

“I was actually connecting with my cultural roots and also creating things that people were enjoying and that they really loved,” she says. “I have a lot of Filipino-American students and people living in Knoxville reach out to me and tell me, ‘My parents live far away, and me being able to get these treats closer to me is so nice.’ That feeling stuck with me.”

What started as a pandemic hobby became a weekend side hustle. Her growing popularity earned her a spot on the full-time schedule at the Market Square Farmers Market. Girls Gotta Eat Good, Knoxville’s first Asian bakery, rose in popularity so quickly that she took a leap of faith and worked to make it her primary source of income.

The struggles she faced as a small business owner inspired her to partner with Korean fusion restaurant Seoul Brothers to start the Knox AAPI Business Association. Asian-owned businesses “don’t have a ton of money or resources,” she says. “There are no existing grants for Asian business owners in Knoxville. This is something that we would like to change and advocate for.”

Both Carr and the folks at Seoul Brothers do “Asian-Southern fusion” with the food they create. “We want to show to other Asian Americans who exist in the South that it’s not so uncommon for these things to be together,” she says. “It’s very beautiful when they meld to express our cultural identity.”

With Girls Gotta Eat Good, Carr seeks to educate Knoxville’s about cultural differences and fusions.

“Sometimes people point at my matcha cookies, which are green, or my ube crinkle cookies, and ube is a purple yam,” says Carr. “Very vibrant, purple dessert. People say, ‘this is so exotic. So weird.’ I always try to talk to them in a very nice way and say, ‘I think you could phrase this differently. Exotic is not the best word to say. It’s unique, and that’s fair to say.’”

She envisions a world where Knoxville’s of all backgrounds can appreciate their local foodmakers, even if their creations taste a little different. “Something that’s so weird and foreign to them isn’t necessarily to other people. These foods are close to home to them, just like they are to me.”

HOLY LAND MARKET + DELI

"Get your ass out of bed," Denise told her husband Walter in 2005. She waved his latest Sears paycheck in his face. "We're gonna buy the Holy Land Market." So he got up, drove to Sutherland Avenue, made the deal, and the duo took over the next day.¹

The Long Islanders renovated the small Middle Eastern grocery with hopes of one day serving food. Not even a year into their new venture, a mishandled propane tank next door set the whole building on fire. They persevered, even though it was just the two of them. After a quick rebuild, they reopened, expanded, and added seating. They added "& Deli" to the sign out front.

Walter Ajlouny grew up in Michigan and moved to New York at 18. His mother and uncle came to the United States in a cargo boat from Palestine and gained citizenship when they arrived. Their father, an American working for the USDA, first met their mother in Beirut.

Ajlouny's roots play a powerful role in his life and cooking. After a lifetime of restaurant work, he is comfortable cooking whatever his customers might crave. For his weekly specials at Holy Land, he incorporates traditional Middle Eastern cuisine, his fondness for New York delis, and his wife's Italian-Irish heritage. "We're all related," Ajlouny says of the folks at the local temple, where he cooked for a few years. His affinity for matzoh and gefilte fish never faded.

"We started serving food, and it went well," says Ajlouny, recalling the early days of the couple's ownership of Holy Land. "I did my first St. Paddy's day, and we sold out." For 17 years, they've kept up the tradition of serving classic reuben sandwiches on the holiday in honor of his wife's Irish background. "We started out the first year with 30 pounds, and this year we did 400 pounds of corned beef. Same recipe."

Expect to be surprised by the Sutherland staple's menu each week. From four-cheese, four-meat lasagna to beef tongue to lamb and rice-stuffed squash (which I can vouch for), Ajlouny recommends his customers bring an empty stomach and open mind. His regulars simply request, "Whatever you make, we'll take."

"People come in, ask me how to make this or that. It's no problem," he shrugs. "I tell them how to cook something or what I would use. The food is home cooking. Here, everything you eat has its own flavor."

The business is family-run, so Ajlouny as a personal stake in ensuring customer satisfaction. "It's not about the dollar," he says. "The dollar will follow. We try to just be warm and welcome, and take care of people's needs."

Since the restaurant opened, Ajlouny says, "My wife did all the hummuses and salads and took care of the people at the register while I cooked." Her inviting personality and his cozy cooking brought in regulars and newbies for years. He shows me a folder on his phone full of pictures of her.

"For 30 years we were together. But I lost my wife 17 months ago. She is missed very, very much."

His son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren moved from Pennsylvania to help Ajlouny transition into the next phase of his life. "I'm going to New York soon, so for 10 days, we'll see how they do," he smiles. "If it goes well, I'll plan my next trip: Italy in September." The plan is to pass the business to the next generation, "if that's what they want."

DENISE'S HUMMUS	
INDUSTRIAL SIZED CAN OF GARBANZO*	
HANDFUL OF GARLIC	
CUP AND A QUARTER OF LEMON JUICE	
2 CUPS OF WATER	
2 TBSP OF SALT	
BLEND IT	*HOLY LAND USES AN
	INDUSTRIAL FOOD
	PROCESSOR, SO
	PORTION ACCORDINGLY.

Although they seem prepared to assume responsibility for the family business, Ajlouny is not too concerned if his son and daughter-in-law decide to move on. "Now, in my life," he says, "I don't let anything bother me. I want to travel. I've been in the kitchen working for 45 years. I've done my time."

The tentative retirement plans won't get in the way of St. Paddy's day 2024, though. Next year, Ajlouny plans to cook the "biggest batch of corned beef yet."



FORAGING BY THE FREEWAY

The Tale of Turkey Creek

"America has its own Lost Atlantis," declared Frank Thone in the *Knoxville News Sentinel* in October of 1942. When the Tennessee Valley Authority erected one of their dams in Pickwick Landing, Tennessee, they uncovered dwelling and burial sites belonging to Native inhabitants.¹

When the archaeologists drove shovels into the mound, they quickly realized that the great heap consisted mainly of freshwater mussel shells. Thone suggested that the Native inhabitants had set up "flimsy dwellings" on the riverbank for easy access to the shellfish, which they cooked crudely and tossed aside. Supposedly their only source of food, the Indians just "let them lay" when they were done with them.²

But like many other researchers during this time period, Thone was mostly wrong about the Eastern Band of Cherokee that used to freely reign in East Tennessee. Native foodways were not "one long clambake" as he claimed, but rather a complex system of fishing, hunting, and foraging.

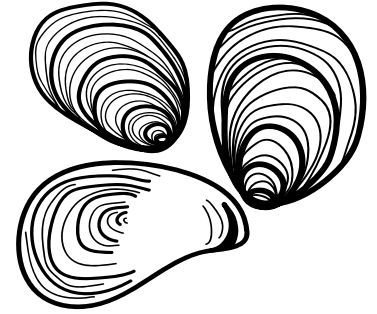
In the spring, Cherokees ate mostly greens. By summer, bounteous berries and fruit were juiced and preserved. Nuts and seeds could be found in autumn, and roots were collected in the wintertime. They fished in the warm months, hunted in the cold.³

"Mushrooms are a delicacy that the Cherokees have always gathered and eaten." Dr. Brooke Bauer studies Southeastern Native American history at the University of Tennessee. "They're well known for gathering and foraging ramps, which are kind of like wild onions with more of a licorice flavor."⁴

Mussels were not a major food source. Native Appalachians used their shells as tools, decorations, and even crushed them into temper to harden clay pottery for thousands of years.⁵ Cherokees used mussels, also known as dagvna, as ceremonial instruments. Not viewed as particularly tasty, mussels were eaten mainly as a last resort.⁶

But flavor aside, many modern Cherokee are not aware of their ancestral consumption and collection of freshwater mussels, despite strong historical evidence that suggests their use.⁷ Based on her research, Bauer says that "it's not oral tradition."

A likely explanation for this disconnect is the sharp decline in mussel populations over the last century. Tennessee mussels have been nearly eliminated in both abundance and species richness due to damming and toxic water pollution.⁸



As a member of the Catawba Nation in South Carolina, Bauer draws comparisons between her tribe and the Cherokees' declining ability to forage in southern Appalachia. Traditional Cherokee food sources are threatened by a myriad of environmentally destructive processes. Just in the last hundred years, automobiles, highway construction, textile and paper mills, logging, and dam building have caused massive amounts of water and air pollution in the region.⁹

Bauer points out that many vulnerable flora and fauna are not only used for food. "A lot of these herbs and roots that are being destroyed were historically used as medicine that healers used for ailments like rheumatism and childbirth pain," she claims. "Everything you could think of, they had a natural treatment that they foraged."

Native Appalachians rely on certain species for economic purposes as well. "Baskets are a way that many Cherokees supplement their income, especially retired people who have time to make these pieces of artwork," Bauer says. "If they don't have rivercane, that's less money coming into their homes."

The Cherokees' supply of natural goods and ingredients defines their social, economic, and cultural order. While it wanes, the traditions that bonded members for centuries weaken.

Of all the ecosystems imperiled by development, the Tennessee River and its tributaries are perhaps the most critical. Not only are rivers wholly central to Cherokee subsistence and spirituality, but the Tennessee River alone houses 1,400 aquatic species, while 5.8 million people live along its watershed and use its resources.¹⁰

German scientist Dr. Andreas Fath swam the river in 2017 with a water sampling device strapped to his leg. He found 16,000 particles of tiny plastic debris per cubic meter and 547 miles of fish consumption advisories. "The chemicals you find in the river is a mirror of our society," said the swimmer, referring to the contaminating industries at play.¹¹

Poor water quality is strongly correlated with low biodiversity.

Mussels, in particular, are vital to the health of a stream.

"They are a keystone species for the food web," says Dr. Mike McKinney, earth and planetary scientist at UT.¹² "They feed muskrats and a lot of other animals." When crucial keystone species cease to exist, the chains of dependency holding the food web together collapse, and the ecosystem does, too.

Mussels are also indicator organisms, meaning their abundance (or lack thereof) can be examined to determine water quality conditions. They bury into the streambed, filtering toxins and heavy metals out of the water like the liver of a river.¹³ If mussels are sickly or absent, stream health is likely dreadful.

McKinney began to study the mussels at Turkey Creek in West Knoxville in the 1990s, when Knox County's largest wetland was transformed into its largest commercial development.¹⁴

Turkey Creek is a shopping and dining destination in Farragut, west of downtown Knoxville. From Hobby Lobby to Sun Tan City, options are limitless if you've got a credit card.

"As Knoxville grew in the '80s, the real estate developers got out their maps," McKinney says. "It's not rocket science. 'There's an interstate exit here, so it's gonna be a big commercial area.'"

This logic worked out particularly well for Turkey Creek developers because West Knoxville is home to so many former urbanites who fled desegregation in the mid twentieth century. The convenient exclusivity of speciality retailers and high-end boutiques in Turkey Creek appealed to white, affluent folks in the suburbs.

Founder John Turley proposed a mega-development at the Turkey Creek wetland in the 1990s, forming a coalition of business partners and county government officials.

"They see empty farmland, and they just want to build on it," says McKinney. But the land wasn't just empty. The Turkey Creek development was right on top of a sensitive and functional wetland.

Wetlands are rare in Knox County, and so they hold great importance in providing habitat, controlling flooding, and purifying our water. Human activity disrupts ecosystems, which then disrupts the availability of resources we consume, like aquatic animals and clean water.

"One of the things we were really fighting was the fact that they were using taxpayer dollars to build the roads and subsidize the project," recalls McKinney. "Not only was it destructive, but it was using tax dollars. It's just insulting."

McKinney's students motivated him to get involved. A group of environmentalists at UT formed the Turkey Creek Wetland Alliance in response to the impending construction. They held public hearings, made phone calls to officials,

wrote letters, and passed around petitions, gaining support from tens of thousands of concerned Knoxvilleans.

If the mega-development did anything for people in the city, it certainly gave them an issue to bond over.

The *News Sentinel* reported optimistically of the economic output of Turkey Creek on the front page of the paper on June 1st, 1997, claiming the developers would also be "protecting and enhancing a wetland area" for the public sector.¹⁵

"Not mentioned were the questions, concerns, and opposition surrounding this project," resident Linda Ewald wrote to the editor a few weeks later. "In my dreams, I see the Turkey Creek wetland being left alone to function as

God and nature designed," she said. "People need green space, too— something West Knox County is rapidly losing."¹⁶

Despite the public outcry, nothing changed, and the founders ceremoniously cut the ribbon to open the shopping district in 2006.

"We got concessions," says McKinney. "If you go out there to the McDonald's, park your car and walk on the greenway, there's a little sign that says 'protected Turkey Creek area.' These things are jokes."

Jim Nixon, partner with Turkey Creek Land Partners, told



the *Sentinel* in 2006 that he's most proud of the protected wetlands area that freshwater mussels call home. "Species are thriving. If ever there was a successful mitigation in Tennessee, this is it."¹⁷ Former mayor of Farragut claimed the Turkey Creek Land Partners went "out of their way to create a beautiful setting."¹⁸

'Beautiful' and 'thriving' are not the words McKinney would use to describe the distressed ecosystem.

"It's a joke," he remarks. "The wetland is basically a urinal for all the waste. Everyone who studies mussels is sick to their stomach."

When the wetland suffers, so does the river. Wetlands slow water momentum, and disturbances increase the risk of flashier floods and erosion. When the river suffers, so do people. The toxic runoff of chemicals like PCBs and mercury are not only environmentally harmful, but they make it increasingly difficult to safely fish and eat aquatic life.

So, to develop or to not? The answer boils down to what municipalities value more: the economy or the environment. Is there a way to save both?

"Regulate, regulate, regulate," demands McKinney. There's currently little to no regulation on housing, commercial, and agricultural developments along watersheds like Turkey Creek.

While political processes are vital to changing the way we treat our food and water resources, it may require a more widely encompassing shift in values. By incorporating Native ecological knowledge into our everyday lives, we could develop a new understanding of the world around us.

Traditional Cherokee values promote conservation and resource management without abstaining from using land for human benefit. Native Americans weren't perfect environmentalists. They exploited land for their benefit by killing animals, cutting trees, clearing land for farming, and even deforesting landscapes. Our perception of the "ecological Indian," says anthropologist Shepard Krech, is mostly an illusion. The difference between Native and Western values is respect.¹⁹



The Cherokee folktale of Little Deer explores what happens when humans overuse resources. As humans grew in population, they also grew in demand, contempt, and thoughtlessness when it came to their food resources. Hunters used bows and arrows to kill deer for the thrill, not just necessity. The deer clan chief, Little Deer, responded by sending "crippling rheumatism" to those who neglected to follow a few simple rules: ceremoniously ask the animal permission, then show its spirit respect during the kill. Because most humans obeyed, there are still wild animals and happy hunters today.²⁰

Another story outlines the importance of maintaining balance in the ecosystem. In the tale of the Hunter and Dagwa, a hunter swallowed by a great fish uses mussel shells to cut a path to safety. He crawled out of its scaly flesh quietly so as to not disturb the great fish.

Food and ecology are intrinsically intertwined. Of course we need to use and sometimes abuse the natural world for consumption and convenience, but in order to avoid complete environmental degradation, we should interfere as minimally as possible. Perhaps the way to achieve this is by shifting our approach to the natural world.

We don't need to ask every single organism for permission to develop; the world would end before we got around to them all. What they really need is a touch more respect.

dinner with the world

i asked the world if it had something
good for me today and the world said
go fish

so i took my dad's favorite pole
because i know he won't miss it
but i hate the feeling of
piercing a worm through
a hook it doesn't seem fair
but the world said
that's life

and i case and recast while watching
where i stepped for snakes and
goose shit until i caught a bass
large or small i don't know
but it will make dinner all the same
so i thanked to world and
the world just said
eat

Hailie Hensley

Phoenix Literary Arts Magazine, Fall 2022

EATING AT HOME

Fact & Fiction of the Knoxville Garden

Appalachian self-sufficiency came to a screeching halt when King Coal began his reign over the region. The forest once served as a renewable treasury of resources with wild game, food to forage, clearings for raising crops, and fodder to feed animals. But in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, mining (and logging) companies stripped their workers of their ability to provide for their own by kicking off an unprecedented wage-based economy.¹

Company towns housed mining households. Often paid in coins or coupons called "scrip," miners and their families could only buy necessities and food products from company-approved stores.² This not only placed them in a state of dependency to the company, but also completely obscured the value of any products offered. Many mining families chose to avoid this crooked system by growing their own food and raising their own livestock.

Gardening is how most mountain families got by for hundreds of years, before and after coal. By gathering, growing, and preserving for the winter, households could provide for themselves on small plots. Okra, beans, turnips, potatoes, onions, apples, plums, tomatoes, ramps, chickens, pigs, and buckwheat were common foods. For poorer families, corn and cabbage provided much of the nutrients necessary to get through the day.³ When miners' brought their families to company towns, they continued to sustain themselves without succumbing to spending their devalued scrip in company stores.

Mining town officials saw an opportunity here: by regulating and even requiring families to raise gardens on their plots, the company could lower wages that would have been spent on food. The garden no longer served as the backbone of household autonomy; it was justification for exploitation advertised as pleasure. Historian Steven Stoll calls this phenomenon the "captured garden."⁴

Industry officials claimed the gardens provided a sense of community, but really preferred them for the added incentive to remain at a particular company, which would in turn "dampen labor unrest and discourage strikes."⁵ The new greenery was more attractive than barren dirt, which also reflected well on the state of company grounds.

But gardening in the company towns was not the aesthetic-driven or leisurely hobby we now see in *Southern Living*. The captured gardens, according to Stoll, were "contested grounds between the poor and the powerful

over who controlled food and the terms of labor."⁶ The coal industry's romanticization of the produce also contradicted the commonly held assumption that the Appalachian makeshift diet was nutritionally and economically unsuitable.

By the 1930s, agricultural economists, foresters, and New Dealers were making their mark on the region as planners, convinced that mountain people were oblivious to proper land use and plagued by poverty. They deemed these mountain farms submarginal and economically unviable.⁷

The planners could not fathom an agricultural rhythm that valued self-sufficiency over a surplus of crops. Mountain farmers, distant from advancements in industrial agriculture like chemical fertilizers and other technologies, operated on smaller scales to accommodate the shallow, rocky soil.

It certainly wasn't easy to be a mountain farmer during this time. Steady population pressure, deforestation by lumber companies, profit-hungry absentee landlords claiming land, and expansion of commercial agriculture all took a toll on the landscape and people. But planners chose a narrative that painted Appalachian ignorance as the problem instead.⁸

Rather than attempt to understand the idea of forest as an open commons, planners sought to resettle Appalachians into new jobs, like chopping lumber, building dams along the Tennessee River, or mining coal in the reserves.⁹

Ironically, not long after New Dealers helped dismantle small-scale gardening in Appalachia, the government would promote the same concept to the nation. Fear of food shortages during World War II led to a national foods-for-victory program in which the federal government incentivized millions of



people to grow food in backyards and vacant lots.

The federal government asked the public to produce, conserve, share, and “play square” with their food, meaning they abide by the Home Front Pledge: “I will pay no more than Top Legal Prices. I will accept no Rationed Goods without giving up Ration Stamps.” Americans were wary of the request to reduce their food intake. In response, the guilt-absolved US government devised a simple solution: grow your own.¹⁰

By 1944, there were about 30,000 “victory gardens” in the Knoxville area. The *Knoxville News Sentinel* published a weekly column by the Horticulture Department at UT, providing tips, tricks, and warnings about upcoming cold spells or nasty weather.¹¹

Encouragement to get on the ground with neighbors and contribute to the war effort was everywhere. Newspapers and radio promoted a mixture of mythologized appreciation for gardening and unwavering expectation of patriotism from citizens. The gardens called back to “simpler” times in American history.

A *News Sentinel* reporter waxed philosophical in 1943, “What can be done with Mother Earth and what Mother Earth can do to an individual is beyond the comprehension of those who have not tilled the soil.”¹² This sentiment coincided with the popular notion that gardens were the manifestation of an earthly paradise, “evidence of God’s handiwork on earth.”¹³ Though “sweat-producing” and laborious, the 1943 column wrote that tilling the soil is a provision of “relief from the strain of daily tasks,” similar to the pleasurable sensations that coal industry officials claimed could be found in company gardens.¹⁴

Another angle was civic responsibility, like in a Help Wanted ad in the 1943 *News Sentinel*: “If you are a plowman, consider it your patriotic duty to make your services available for plowing Victory Gardens.”¹⁵ This strategy worked wonders. That year, victory gardens reached a peak: 60% of the population produced more than 8 million tons of vegetables, fruit, and meat.¹⁶

Suddenly the very practices that were dismissed during the New Deal era were deemed essential to the war effort. Victory gardens were patriotic, but mountain agriculture was regressive. The self-provisioning practiced on the family-scale in Appalachia was inefficient, but when done for the sake of the country’s hunger, noble.

Then something curious happened. The war ended, and talk of the victory garden did too. Gardening was apparently a reminder of hard times, and so people sought the comforts of peacetime. In early 1951, the *News Sentinel*

officially announced the end of the federal push for victory gardens. “There are no food shortages in sight,” Washington reasoned.¹⁷

When the war ended in 1945, victory gardeners slowly set down their trowels. They were no longer interested in protecting the public good, which, with no more war to win, was deemed no longer necessary to maintain peace. The priority was now to protect the “American way of life,” AKA material goods and luxuries. People moved to cities. The rise of supermarkets and convenience foods gave way to the ease of consuming food rather than growing it.

The government kept up with food conservation, canning, and gardening campaigns for a bit. But despite being the wealthiest nation in the world, the United States failed to meet export goals for famine relief in Europe. Postwar American demand was so high for foods like bread that grain pledges were not met for many European countries. Realizing that Americans were unwilling to continue the backyard fight against scarcity, the federal government let go of the victory garden program.¹⁸

Despite the leisure with which grocery shoppers could now buy anything and everything at any time, global food crises in the latter half of the twentieth century revealed the true colors of the now-industrial food system. Food infrastructure like school lunch programs became increasingly privatized, and the value of nutrition was de-emphasized by the US government. Oil crises raised food prices. Communities saw new waves of malnutrition and hunger. Yet still, there was no return of the once celebrated victory garden.¹⁹

Counterculture movements during the 1970s, concerned about environmental and human health, pushed for a “back to the land” utopia. Young folks flocked to grow food on empty land like at “The Farm” in Summertown, Tennessee. Most of these communes, however, had little longevity or success.

Other activists like Mississippi’s Fannie Lou Hamer formed southern cooperative farms in the ‘70s. Hamer’s cooperative committed to securing economic and agricultural independence for local Black families. She set the precedent for modern conversations about food sovereignty, or the right for people to control their own production, distribution, and consumption of food.²⁰

Knoxville too began a slow return to the idea of community gardens in 1973 with the Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee (CAC) Green Thumb Program to encourage residents to grow food. One of the most successful projects, Beardsley Community Farm, was founded in 1998 for food security and garden education.

It's located at Malcolm Martin Park in the Lonsdale neighborhood.²¹

Charlotte Rodina is the director of Beardsley nowadays. She found a love for food and farming during and after college, but she wanted to live in a city. "I don't really like being secluded in rural areas," she says. "My love for farming combined with my love for being connected to a community made sense for working on an urban farm."²²

Beardsley is just that: a farm designed to operate within a city. Its operators work directly with local organizations and volunteers to increase food security and education in Knoxville, providing garden beds, supplies, and skills. Elementary schoolers often visit for a lesson and snack.

"We recently planted potatoes with the kids and taught them about different parts of the plant," Rodina shares. "We also did a food prep class, where we chopped sweet and white potatoes and portioned out olive oil and rosemary for it. They took it home, and cooked it with their families."

A key component of Beardsley's social impact is the provision of culturally appropriate seeds to those who reserve beds for private use. Many refugees living in Lonsdale take advantage of this.

"The refugee population is mostly from West Africa, so Burundi and the Republic of the Congo," says Rodina. "They have been growing a lot of intorye, which is similar to an eggplant, and amaranth, which are really important to their diet."

Planting traditional foods preserves cultural knowledge for future generations. The agricultural independence of a community garden empowers immigrant communities to navigate their new country with the comforts of a familiar diet.

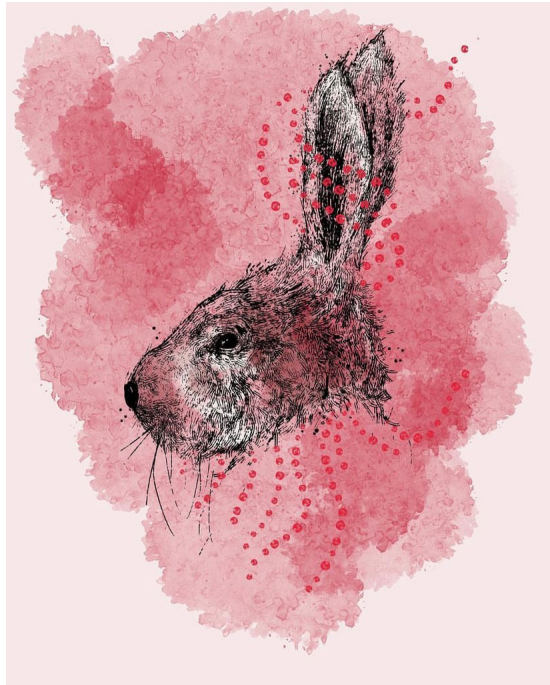
Rodina explains that promoting traditional food customs creates opportunities for mutual learning on the farm. For the elementary school kids who visit week to week, learning about other cultures helps to break down barriers and possible prejudices early on.

Farms like Beardsley are great for people who live nearby, like the West African refugees, or people who have a car (and the time) to come water their plot each day, but driv-

ing isn't always an option.

"You got the problem of accessibility," says Knoxville food advocate Chris Battle, whose urban farm targets the 37915 zip code - East Knoxville, the historic African-American hub near downtown. "Most of the people we serve are making less than \$20,000 a year."²³

Sometimes the Concord United Methodist Church would donate hundreds of 10-lb bags of sweet potatoes to BattleField Farm. "'Come get these taters,'" Battle would tell people on Facebook Live. "Two or three hours later, they were gone. Then it hit me. The demographic I'm specifically trying to reach may not have internet, may not have adequate transportation. How do I get this to them? Well, I'll get a truck."



Untitled Rabbit by Death Nurse

The truck's name? Fannie Lou - in homage to the Mississippi freedom farmer.

Cincinnati-native Battle moved to Knoxville with his wife in 2008 to serve as pastor at the Tabernacle Baptist Church. His urban gardening began with a small plot in the churchyard, an effort to combat years of sinking attendance.

"I'm in the garden meeting all these community members," he recalls of spring 2018. "I'd been here ten years, and I met more people in that first season in the garden than the first ten years in my office."

There's no major grocery store in the 37915 zip code. It's a food desert, meaning residents are more than half a mile away from access to affordable, healthy food. "Two things were happening at the same time: an attack of the food disparity, but also a new way to do church and meet people in the community," explains Battle. "They merged together."

After seeing people come out for his garden, he realized a passion for community food security that, apart from a general liking for "watching things grow," he never predicted. He inspired four other pastors to garden with their congregation and community, founded the Eastside Sunday farmer's market with other food justice advocates in town, and eventually left pastorhood to expand his garden into what is now the multi-acre BattleField Farm, located on Boyds Bridge Pike in East Knoxville.

There's plenty of food to go around. BattleField grows food



with the help of volunteers, farmers at the market give away excess produce, and churches and food banks always have goods to donate. Battle and Fannie Lou take it where it needs to go.

"I'm seeing people who are literally dying every-day because of their diet. I'm glad to serve them," he says. "We know we're hitting a need, but that saddens me and inspires me at the same time."

One of the biggest challenges is sustaining community engagement. People are receptive to food, but encouraging a laborious task where compensation lies a season away is difficult. It's especially hard for the Black community, where people face long histories of forced and coerced agricultural labor. "To African Americans who haven't done it in a while, it gets associated with negative stigma," says Battle. "'Oh, that's slavery.' It's so out of our routine. But we can do it 'cause we're good at it."

He recalls the advice of a friend, "'Before you build a garden, make sure you got gardeners.' I thought, yeah right. Build it, they'll come." He laughs, "He was so right! People are very excited at the beginning. They're very excited when it starts sprouting. They're not very excited when the weeds start growing, and it's July, and it's hot."

Rodina concurs, "We never force people to come [to Beardsley], but sometimes people get busy or tired, and they stop coming. It can be hard."

But Battle looks at it this way: "I think, what happens if our food supply gets cut off? If for some reason,

people lose a Save-A-Lot or Kroger? We die. We literally die."

"My goal is to get everyone to grow one crop," he says. "Just one crop well. Then if we trade? We could eat for free. It takes work, but it's not that much. A seed's gonna do what a seed's gonna do."

Battle is lively and passionate. Imagining him in the pastor's pulpit makes total sense. The father of nineteen mostly adopted kids and avidly engaged member of East Knoxville, he's clearly a people person. It seems like he knows everyone.

"My faith drives me to do this," he explains. "It's 'inextricably intertwined,' as my professor in college used to say. I don't know how to separate it. What I do with food is my response to the gospel. It's what fuels me and wakes me up in the morning."

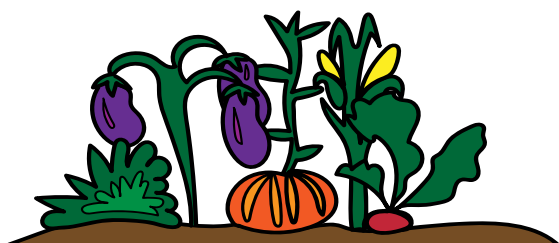
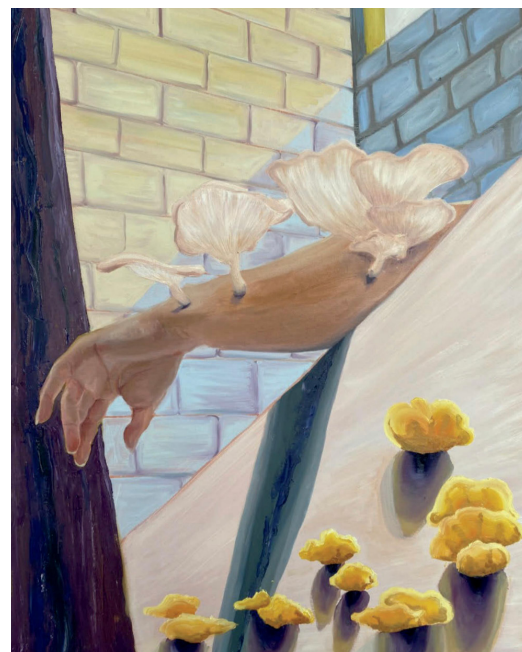
Rather than romanticizing God's handiwork in the garden like the media did to advertise victory gardens during the war, Battle connects his faith to service and justice, which he believes permeate the Bible. People are the most important part of his mission.

The divisions caused by a lack of food hurt his neighborhood, so he responded with strategy to mend the fracture. The garden is not an opportunity for beauty or conversion; it's an opportunity for affection.

"With the farm, I began to meet people that would never come to my church. And when I say never, I mean never ever. I missed all these beautiful, wonderful, innovative, peace-loving people. I'm glad to serve them."

Rodina and Battle share a passion for feeding, not just eating or growing. They know it's not enough to share a love for food; it's imperative to love sharing the food.

It's difficult to define what is best for the public. Is international warfare necessary to justify a countrywide effort towards self-provisioning, or is neighborhood hunger enough? In a world of nearly constant social, environmental, and economic unpredictability, it seems best to learn to sow a seed, just in case. At the very least, find a neighbor who can help.



All in all -

We learn from history. This principle feels redundant in the classroom, but it's true. The queer coffee shop takes inspiration from the gay bar, tweaked to meet the current needs of the community. Backyard gardens, whether on coal company grounds or vacant city lots, reinforce the necessary ability to opt out of unjust food systems. The tamale takes on new forms and new identities, but at the end of the day, it's meat and corn meal in a cornhusk.

Outsiders often catalyzed division in Knoxville's food history. In the greater region surrounding the city, coal and lumber capitalists wormed their way into Appalachian communities for land, resources, and labor. The federal government encroached on moonshiners to make way for cash in a cashless economy. These infringements impacted peoples' ability to grow, make, eat, and sell their food products the way they wanted, whether or not it was the most efficient way to do so. Within Knoxville, development-oriented planners and businessmen followed a similar path. Renewal projects often hampered traditional foodways, whether they be thousand-year-old mussel foraging or decades-worth of tamale pushcarting on Central Avenue. One thing is clear: if small food makers cannot compete with these forces financially, their best shot at permanence is through unwavering community support.

Knoxvillians that participate in urban gardens, patronize local food businesses, and actively converse with their neighbors about cultural heterogeneity are the reason for a sense of togetherness in food-related spaces. Customer loyalty fosters trust and belonging between owners and patrons, which allows these businesses to stay afloat during challenging times. Community participation at urban gardens and local markets, while not always guaranteed, often facilitates conversation, friendship formation, and cultural exchange. When people eat outside of their comfort zone, and more importantly, talk about it, they may feel more comfortable with those who produced the food. Jessica Carr's business depends on the willingness of her customers to try her foods with no judgment, just as the folks using Beardsley's garden plots must embrace their West African neighbors planting what they choose.

Patterns of both unity and division emerged in this study and often coexisted. The gray area was most evident, exemplified by downright ironies. The World's Fair, for example, put Knoxville on the map as a destination capable of hosting millions of hungry tourists. 1982 is nothing short of glorious in Knoxville history books, yet the economic burden on the civilians paying the bills is rarely recognized. The defining theme of the gray area was the willingness to care about food more than the people that invent, cook, and serve it. The chop suey craze popularized American Chinese food at a time when Chinese people had no chance of American citizenship. Black tamale sellers in the Old City fed people of every class, race, and status, yet discriminative policymakers and people forbade Black Knoxvillians from enjoying the same adoration and respect that the cornhusks received. There are many environmental and health-related factors we forget when we eat our meals, but I believe the most forgotten is the connection to other people.

This is not a love letter to Knoxville, food, or the people that handle it. I do love Knoxville, because it's easier that way. Everyone involved with this project that I asked said that they did too. Perhaps it was a pointed or unfair question, but every single person was quick with their "yes." History should not be generalized, and neither should cities. I love my Knoxville, just as Joslynn Fish loves hers south of the river and Chris Battle loves his on the east side.

Harm, big and small, always exists and permeates human lives. I don't believe I'm qualified to discount it in any form. Highlighting harm within food systems highlights harm within greater society. Food is simultaneously taken for granted and scarce, simultaneously enjoyed and denied. It's incredibly complicated, and it deserves a greater

place in academia. Food is intimately tied to almost every facet of our society: politics, public health, economics, environment, and culture. If we approach history through a food lens, we can see that we are not just what we eat. We are the consequences of people handling food for millions of years, in Knoxville and everywhere.

Food carries the potential to bring people together. It doesn't always succeed, and it never will completely. Individual action is not my preferred method for collective change, but equitable eating requires a mindful approach. This requires a willingness to learn about and from the people around us. Whether this learning takes place through giving time, brainpower, or business, breaking bread in Knoxville is dependent upon people seeking other people for kinship and understanding.

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