

KAS RADIO - Episode 6

Animal Foodways of Kentucky's Enslaved People A Think History Radio Spot

Episode Transcript

What foods did enslaved people eat during Kentucky's Antebellum period?

Discarded animal bones recovered during archaeological investigations at central Kentucky slave house sites show that enslaved people ate mostly pork and lower-quality meat cuts, like pigs' feet. To add variety, they hunted wild game - rabbit, squirrel, opossum, bobwhite, softshell turtle - and fished.



Pork was the mainstay for Kentucky's enslaved blacks. These men are cooking pigs over a bed of coals.

Bert Mayfield, formerly enslaved in Garrard County, commented *Possum and coon hunts were big events - they would hunt all night. The little boys would fish, bringing home their fish to be scaled by rubbing them between their hands, rolled in meal, and cooked in a big skillet.*

Beef, mutton, and chicken appeared occasionally on their plates, and high-quality cuts of any meat were rare. Enslaved people often made soups and stews from scraps and leftovers they brought home from the main house.

To Read More

A History of Blacks in Kentucky, Vol. 1, From Slavery to Segregation, 1760-1891, by Marion B. Lucas (1992). Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort.

Traces the role of Blacks from the early exploration and settlement of Kentucky to 1891, when African Americans gained freedom only to be faced with a segregated society. Extensive use of primary sources: slave diaries, Freedmen's Bureau records, church minutes, personal papers.

The Cooking Gene: A Journey through African American Culinary History in the Old South, by Michael W. Twitty (2017). Amistad/Harper Collins, New York.

A memoir of Southern cuisine and food culture by a renowned culinary historian that traces his family's roots and the origins of soul food, barbecue, and all Southern cuisine. This book

illustrates the power food has to bring together the kin of the enslaved and their former slaveholders.

Kentucky Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in Kentucky from Interviews with Former Slaves (1936-1938), by the

Federal Writers' Project, Works Progress Administration (2006). Library of Congress, Applewood Books, Bedford, MA.

First-person accounts of slavery and 500 black-and-white photographs of former slaves collected in the 1930s as part of the Federal Writers' Project (FWP) of the Works Progress Administration, later renamed Work Projects Administration (WPA).

Image Credits

"A Southern Barbecue" (wood engraving from a sketch by Horace Bradley), *Harpers Weekly*, July 1887.

(<https://museumofuncutfunk.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/A-Southern-Barbecue-a-wood-engraving-from-a-sketch-by-Horace-Bradley-published-in-Harpers-Weekly-July-1887..jpg>).

To learn more about **Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938**, go to <https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/about-this-collection/>. Find the Kentucky Slave Narratives in Volume 7 here: <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mesn.070/?st=gallery>

Narrative of the Sufferings of Lewis Clarke, During a Captivity of More Than Twenty-Five Years, Among the Algerines of Kentucky, One of the So Called Christian States of America, Dictated by Himself, by Lewis Garrard Clarke (1845). David H. Ela, Printer, Boston, MA. Electronic Edition (1999), Academic Affairs Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill. (<https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/clarke/clarke.html>).

Originally published in 1845, this was the first narrative to be copyrighted by a slave. Lewis Clarke, born in 1815 in Madison County, Kentucky, dictated his story to the abolitionist J. C. Lovejoy. It directly inspired Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel Uncle Tom's Cabin.

The Strength of These Arms by Raymond Bial (2000). HMH Books for Young Readers/ HoughtonMifflinHarcourt, Boston. Children's nonfiction book for ages 10-13/5-8th grade.

The everyday life of plantation slaves is detailed in text and haunting photographs of recently excavated plantation sites, giving immediacy to the lives of enslaved Africans while paying tribute to the daily courage of a people who endured against all odds.

Uncovering the Lives of Kentucky's Enslaved People by M. Jay Stottman and Lori C. Stahlgren (2017). Heritage Spotlight 5, Kentucky Archaeological Survey, Lexington. <https://www.kentuckyarchaeologicalsurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Spotlight-No.5-Uncovering-the-Lives-of-Kentuckys-Enslaved-People.pdf>

Summarizes archaeological research carried out at a typical early to late nineteenth century Kentucky plantation in central Kentucky. Focuses on the lifeways of the enslaved Blacks who lived and worked there.



Listen to *Think History* on WEKU-FM Radio 88.9 at 8:19 am and again at 5:19 pm every Monday through Friday.