

KAS RADIO - Episode 7

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

Episode Transcript

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

Seeds recovered during archaeological investigations at central Kentucky slave house sites show that enslaved people ate wheat, barley, and corn - likely surplus field crops given to them by their owner. They also ate beans and squash - foods that came from the plantation's kitchen garden or from their own gardens.



A Black couple in front of their cabin - planting a kitchen garden and feeding chickens.

At one central Kentucky slave house, archaeologists found black-eyed peas. This is a plant native to Africa. In the nineteenth century, white Americans did not usually eat black-eyed peas, but enslaved blacks did. Finding black-eyed peas hints that the plantation's enslaved residents prepared traditional African dishes.

Wes Woods, formerly enslaved in Garrard County, recalled *"We would have beans, cooked in a big kettle in the back yard, cabbage and potatoes, with corn pone bread, baked in a big oven in the yard and plenty of good buttermilk to drink."*



Black-eyed peas - shelled (far left) and in their pods (left).

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.

Image Credits

"A Spring Scene Near Richmond, Virginia", by W. L. Sheppard, *Harper's Weekly*, May 21, 1870, accessed May 13, 2021.

<https://www.loc.gov/item/96513222/>

Black eyed Peas:

<https://www.hobbyfarms.com/how-slavery-influenced-the-food-we-eat-today/>

<https://foodandnutrition.org/blogs/stone-soup/black-eyed-peas-deserve-year-round-attention/>

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).

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.



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