

SAVORING THE SOUTH

EDNA LEWIS

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A NEW YEAR BRUNCH



At the beginning of the new year, when the days are cold, the panes frosty, and the hills covered with a soft white snow, the aura of days long past is particularly emphasized. Much the same as in those days, a warm welcome and a roaring fire are perfect antidotes to a cold wintry day.

New Year's celebrations were very different on the plantation. Instead of a night of partying, New Year's Eve was more of a family gathering, a time to take down the Christmas tree, reflect on the past year, and prepare for the guests who would be arriving the next morning. New Year's Day often began with holiday sportsmen off before dawn to partake in one of the favorite antebellum holiday pastimes—the hunt. After a hearty breakfast, the gentlemen then spent the rest of the day fulfilling social duties by calling on ladies and feasting and quaffing brandy-spiked eggnog.

The night often ended with a ceremonial burning of the Christmas tree as many planters believed the tree should stand no longer than New Year's Day.

Here we celebrate the New Year with a sumptuous brunch. The dining room, furnished with 18th- and 19th- century antiques, is an magnificent setting. Fireplaces are ablaze and soft music fills the air.

As in days past, the table is set with beautiful china and crystal. Food and spirits are plentiful. And, in true Southern tradition, the menu includes pork and blackeyed peas to ensure good luck for the coming year.

A New Year Brunch

Dolley Madison's Bouillon

Sweetbreads with Chestnuts

Country-Fried Virginia Apples

Spicy Sausage Gravy

Stone-Ground Corn Muffins

Philadelphia Scrapple

Smoked Chicken Hash

Iron Skillet Country Omelet

Turnip Hash Browns

Black-eyed Peas with Ham Hocks

Cinnamon-Orange French Toast with Burnt Orange Syrup

Assorted Muffins

Old-Fashioned Tea Biscuits

Holiday Eggnog

BEEF BOUILLON

This old Virginia recipe is probably close to that used to prepare the bouillon Dolley Madison offered her guests when they first arrived at Montpelier.

5 pounds bone-in chuck roast	1 leek
2 pounds beef bones	1 bunch celery
3 quarts water	6 peppercorns
1 large onion	1 bay leaf
6 cloves	1 small bunch parsley
2 carrots	½ teaspoon fresh thyme
	1 tablespoon salt

Place beef and bones in pot containing cold water. Bring to scalding and reduce to slow simmer. Do not let it boil. As the gray scum forms, skim off and discard. Continue until the broth is clear. Add the rest of the ingredients. Cover loosely and simmer for about 6 hours. Remove from burner and strain. Set aside to cool. When cool, skim off all fat. Broth should be perfectly clear.

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ALWAYS PREPARED.

Edna Lewis

HOLIDAY EGGNOG

It is very important to stir the liquor into the eggs so they cook.

12 eggs, separated	1 fifth brandy
1 cup sugar	1 fifth rum
1 quart half and half	1 teaspoon nutmeg
1 quart vanilla ice cream	

Beat egg yolks with sugar until thick and light yellow. Add rum and brandy and mix well. Add half and half and mix well. Add ice cream and stir until melted. Beat egg whites until stiff. Spoon egg whites onto mixture and dust with nutmeg.



A replica of a china cup Dolley Madison may have used to serve bouillon to her guests.

TURNIP HASH BROWNS

REVELING

The custom of making noise to usher in the new year goes back to ancient times when it was thought a great deal of shouting, wailing of horns, and pounding of drums would drive evil spirits away. The practice of blowing trumpets at midnight has been practiced in many countries around the world for centuries. In Britain, in order to emphasize the ringing in of the new year, bells were muffled until midnight when they could be rung loud and clear to signify that the new year had arrived.

Antebellum Virginia was no exception. New Year's Eve was a very noisy time. However, while the Northern states celebrated with bells, horns, whistles, drums, and even pots and pans, Virginians turned to gunpowder to provide the proper noise for the new year, thus setting a fashion for the South to mark the new year with firearms. As the clock struck 12, gentlemen would raise their guns and shoot and children would shriek in glee while the women put their hands over their ears. When a neighbor caught the echo, he would answer by firing, as did his neighbor, and so on. The custom was followed enthusiastically throughout the Old Dominion, and soon became the official way to usher in the new year.

The turnips have a somewhat sharper flavor than potatoes, which gives these hash browns a unique twist.

3 large turnips
1 Idaho potato
1 egg
¼ cup bacon fat
Salt and pepper

Peel turnips and cook in boiling salted water about 10 minutes. Drain and cool. Peel and grate potato. Grate turnips. Place potato and turnips in bowl and season with salt and pepper. Beat egg and add to turnips. Mix together by hand. Form into 1-inch cakes and sauté over medium heat until golden brown.

SMOKED CHICKEN HASH

Fresh chicken can be substituted in this dish, but cook the chicken first and add about a cup of chorizo or andouille sausage and a dash of cayenne for more flavor.

3 pounds smoked chicken
4 cups potatoes
2 cups onions
1 cup green and red bell peppers
2 teaspoons salt
2 tablespoons olive oil

Cut chicken and potatoes into ¼-inch cubes. Chop onions and peppers, toss them with the salt, and sauté in the olive oil until soft. Add the potatoes and cook until they start to brown. Add the chicken and cook for a minute or two. With the back of a spoon, flatten the mixture and cook until bottom becomes brown and crisp.

MEMORIES OF AUNT EDNA

by Nina Williams-Mbengue



Our family has a long history of caring for each other. When my great grandmother died, my grandparents, Eugene and Daisy, raised Eugene's brother Willie's children along with their own. Eugene died when my mother, Naomi, was six months old, and Willie moved back to Virginia to help take care of Daisy and the eight children. Willie lived with the family until the oldest son, Lue Stanley, was 21 years old. My grandmother raised all of these children, on her own, in the South during the Depression of the 1930s. She worked from her home, supporting her family from her garden and the sale of eggs and other small livestock. She was even able to feed other people in the community and people (Black and White) who were down on their luck and passing through the area.

My grandmother Daisy died from cancer when my mother was about 12 years old. My mother's sister Ruth cared for her in her last days. Several months after she died, the youngest brother George was called overseas to serve in World War II. Lue Stanley was allowed to stay to care for and support the family. It was a heartbreaking, bewildering time, especially for my mother who was the youngest and a very sensitive, quiet child.

My mother's older sister Edna was living in New York City, doing domestic work and catering dinner parties at the



Edna and her sister Naomi at Edna's 80th birthday party.

time. She invited my mother to come to New York and live with her in the home of Carolyn Lines, the woman that Edna worked for at the time. My mother attended Julia Richmond High School, an all-girls school with only 5 black students out of 6000 students. Carolyn Lines and Aunt Edna also sent my mother, a talented artist, to attend classes at the New York Arts Students League. When my mother graduated from Julia Richmond H.S. in 1946, the school gave her a scholarship to attend the Art Students League for a year to study art. She continued to live with Edna in the home of Carolyn Lines while Aunt Edna supported her.

In 1947, Naomi and Edna moved to an apartment on 54th Street. Their sister Ruth also lived in the building and worked in Manhattan. The sisters remained very close knit throughout this period. The three of them lived in that same building for a number of years, and their sister Jenny, who lived in Connecticut, would visit New York on Thursdays (maids' day off in those days) and stay with Mom and Aunt Edna. Two of my cousins and I were all born while they lived in that building.

Edna left the Nicholson Café in 1952, where she had been executive chef since 1948, and began working as a caterer and private chef.

Aunt Edna married Steve Kingston, a man 20 years her senior, and they moved to Vineland, New Jersey, where they operated a pheasant farm. I remember visiting their home and collecting beautiful white stones. Unfortunately, the pheasants were all wiped out in one year due to an encephalitis outbreak. So they moved to an apartment in Harlem and Aunt Edna opened a restaurant 125th Street. I was often at the restaurant after school because my mother worked two jobs (and occasionally at the restaurant) to support me. Aunt Ruth's daughter Mattie also worked at the restaurant in the summertime.



Nina and Edna with a friend's mother.

Aunt Edna and Uncle Steve were always involved in politics, the civil rights movement and the Black Power struggle. I remember spending many weekends at their apartment in Harlem and going with them to listen to young men and women on the street corners. It was an exciting time. Uncle Steve had also been very much involved in the Scottsboro Boys trial.

My mother, Aunt Edna, Uncle Steve and I continued to live together in the Bronx. My mother's sister Jenny had moved to Virginia, and I spent the summers at her farmhouse there from the time I was 4 until I was 13. I grew up happily in this very close, very caring, extended family network.

Edna broke her ankle on an icy sidewalk while living in Harlem in 1969 or so. While in the hospital recovering from the broken ankle, Edna collaborated with a friend named Evangeline Peterson to write her first cookbook, *The Edna Lewis Cookbook*.

In 1970, my mother developed pneumonia. We were living in South Bronx in an apartment next to an incinerator in a tenement building that rarely had heat and hot water. We were sure that the pneumonia was caused by the combination of cold air and billowing black smoke from the incinerator. Aunt Ruth was working the University of Pennsylvania Hospital where she immediately had my mother admitted. Aunt Edna and Uncle Steve left their Harlem apartment on 138th street and moved me and our belongings out of the into a building across the street that at least had constant heat. This allowed me to stay in school and in my neighborhood with all of my friends. As an adult I now realize that I could have easily ended up in foster care had it not been for Aunt Edna. During her part of her recuperation period, my mother stayed with Aunt Ruth and then Aunt Jenny on her farm in Virginia

Uncle Steve died in 1973 or 1974, but Aunt Edna remained with us in the apartment.

I would often spend my after-high-school hours with Aunt Edna at the Museum of Natural History where she worked for 7 years as a paid teaching assistant in the African Hall.

