

Family Recipes  
from Rosedown & Catalpa  
Plantations



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BY  
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## Introduction



After nearly half a century of emptiness and silence, the old plantation kitchen at Rosedown has come to life again.

Today, the fire blazes again in the ancient fireplace; iron kettles hang from the old crane, filled with boiling vegetables and meats; close to the fire, two chickens roast slowly in the old “tin kitchen” utensil; and down on the brick hearth, on top of a bed of hot coals, Martha Turnbull’s white cake rises slowly in an iron kettle beneath a cover piled with more hot coals.

The once-a-week cooking demonstrations at Rosedown provide



*Rosedown Plantation House.*

visitors to the state-owned historic site with a tantalizing glimpse of the nineteenth century cooking procedures followed for many years on this historic Louisiana plantation. Visitors also can see for themselves—and sometimes even taste—the quaint, old-fashioned, and sometimes all-but-forgotten dishes enjoyed by Martha and Daniel Turnbull and their family and friends so long ago.

Historians and preservationists have long known that the past can never be recreated exactly as it really was, but the cooking demonstrations at Rosedown come very close, providing a fascinating—and delicious—glimpse of an era that is gone.

This cookbook is an outgrowth of these cooking demonstrations and also is a means of recording and preserving a selection of several hundred Turnbull family recipes, or receipts as they were called, recently discovered in the attic of nearby Catalpa Plantation, a site closely connected with the family and history of Rosedown. These



*Catalpa Plantation House.*

receipts, along with many other hand-written Turnbull family receipts, are used in the Rosedown kitchen demonstrations and are typical of plantation cookery practiced throughout the antebellum and post-bellum South.

The names of these early Southern concoctions are intriguing and delightful: jumbles and puffs, tomatoe soy and monkey pudding, lightning cake and foolish pie.

And where did the Turnbull family find these receipts? Many probably came from their relatives—Martha's family was originally from England, Daniel's came from Scotland. Like all early Southern families, they also exchanged receipts with friends and nearby neighbors in West Feliciana Parish. They often copied receipts they especially liked in nineteenth century cookbooks, such as *Miss Leslie's Seventy-Five Receipts for Pastry, Cakes and Sweetmeats*, published in 1827, and *Miss Leslie's Directions for Cookery*, published in 1851. Martha Turnbull owned both of these early American cookbooks penned by the famous Eliza Leslie of Philadelphia.

Some Turnbull family receipts may even have originated at Mount



*Rosedown Kitchen.*

Vernon, home of America's first president, George Washington. The Turnbull's oldest son, William, married Caroline Butler, whose grandmother was Eleanor Parke Custis Lewis, the famous "Nellie," and whose great-grandmother was Martha Washington herself. Both Nellie and Martha were famous cooks, and many of their original receipts have been preserved, including one of the most famous American receipts, Martha's receipt for "Great Cake," which begins with the words, "Take forty eggs and divide the whites from the yolks . . ."

Hand-written receipts were common in many Southern homes, shared among family and friends and eventually passed down to subsequent generations. Sadly, far too many of these irreplaceable bits of Southern culinary history were lost through the years—forgotten in attic trunks, damaged in fires and storms, left behind when families moved away, or simply discarded by later generations. It is therefore truly remarkable that so many of the Turnbull family's receipts have survived to provide a valuable record of this Louisiana plantation family's dining habits.



*Food prepared in the Rosedown kitchen.*

Established shortly after the state of Louisiana acquired Rosedown Plantation in late 2000, the cooking program was begun by former interpretive park ranger Richard Scott and has been continued by staff members and volunteers, who keep the fires going, cook the dishes, and give visitors an oral history of plantation cooking—its origins, its traditions, and the lasting influence it has had on modern cooking methods and cuisine, not only in the South but throughout the entire country.

The Rosedown Plantation kitchen, like all plantation kitchens, was always separate from the main house, primarily because of the danger of fire but also to keep the heat and smells of cooking far from the house. The meals were cooked here, then carried on covered platters into the service room at the rear of mansion, where they were arranged on serving pieces and carried into the dining room.

Many of the old iron and tin utensils used at Rosedown are original nineteenth century cooking items—kettles and skillets, gridirons and toasters, trivets and graters and corn shellers, long-handled spoons and forks. There are wooden “beadles” (today known as potato mashers) and a “tin kitchen” that is a forerunner of a modern rotisserie oven. Simple and primitive as they all are, they really work, to the amazement and delight of visitors.

Of course, missing from this living portrait of a vital part of nineteenth century plantation life are the people who actually worked in the kitchen and produced the daily meals for the family so long ago—the slave cooks. Ranked at the very top of the plantation’s slave hierarchy, the slave cooks were highly valued and skillful members of the plantation community. Working under the direction of their mistresses, they provided astonishingly diverse and delicious meals under difficult and often uncomfortable circumstances that modern-day cooks can scarcely imagine.

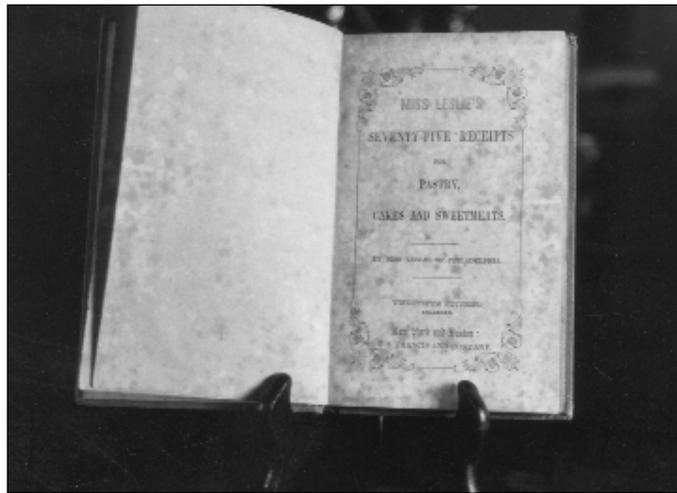
In 1862, an inventory of slaves at Rosedown Plantation listed two cooks—a forty-year-old man named Wilkinson and a woman named Grace, who was fifty. Nothing more is known of them, nor do we know

all the names or the histories of their predecessors or of those who followed after them.

But names can make people from the past seem very real, and it is somehow easy to imagine Wilkinson and Grace as they might have been at Rosedown in 1862: building up the fire, piling up the hot coals, peeling vegetables and mixing puddings, and stirring cake and bread batters. They worked from early morning until late in the evening, day after day, summer and winter. They prepared early morning breakfasts, main meals that were served at three o'clock in the afternoon, and light evening suppers that closed out the long plantation day.

In the hope that Grace and Wilkinson, and all of their fellow slave cooks throughout the plantation South, will always be remembered for their skills and their lasting contributions to Southern cooking, we dedicate this volume to them: to Grace and Wilkinson of Rosedown Plantation and to all the slave cooks who lived and labored in the plantation kitchens of the antebellum South.

Richard Scott, Stella Pitts, and Mary Thompson



*Martha Turnbull's copy of Miss Leslie's Seventy-Five Receipts cookbook.*





*A cook in the kitchen at an unknown Louisiana plantation. Image taken from a glass plate negative, second half of the nineteenth century.*

## Rosedown and Catalpa: The Story of Two Plantations

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Rosedown and Catalpa—two legendary names in West Feliciana Parish, two very different plantation houses that share a common heritage as well as a fascinating history that reaches back to the earliest days of the nineteenth century.

Both houses have close connections with two of the most prominent early plantation families in the region—the Barrows and the Forts. Both were originally surrounded by plantations comprising thousands of acres of cotton and sugar cane. Both were renowned in the region for the wealth, culture, and hospitality of the families who owned them. And both, in different ways, are survivors—reminders of a vanished way of life that have emerged beautiful and vibrant in the twenty-first century.

It was at the very beginning of the nineteenth century—in 1800—that two North Carolina families, the Barrows and the Forts, arrived in “Neuva Feliciana,” a stronghold of the English in a predominantly French and Spanish territory. The Barrows became one of the wealthiest and most prominent families of the Old South, as influential in Louisiana as were the Byrds, the Carters, and the Lees in Virginia. The Forts, cousins to the Barrows, became some of the most prominent planters in Louisiana, owning numerous plantations and hundreds of slaves.

Leading the Barrow family to Louisiana was the widowed Olivia Ruffin Barrow, with her two sons, Robert and William, and her daughter, Mary.

Olivia Barrow is buried in the family cemetery at Highland, the earliest Barrow house still standing in the region and still occupied by descendants of the original builder, Olivia's son, William Barrow III. The house was known in the beginning as Locust Grove and is believed to be the first example of Federal-style architecture built in the Feliciana region.

The gardens at Highland were once extensive and spectacular, and the plantation included an enormous sugarhouse, a racetrack, a dance hall for the slaves, a slave hospital, and numerous other out-buildings.

Martha was the oldest child of William Barrow III and his wife, Pheraby. Born in 1809, it was she, with her husband Daniel Turnbull, who built Rosedown in 1834, six years after their marriage in 1828. The house at Rosedown, with its wide, two-storied front galleries, is believed to have been patterned on Martha's birthplace and early home, Highland.

Like her mother before her, Martha created her own lavish gardens as the setting for her new home, importing plants and statuary from Europe, laying out winding walkways, building quaint summerhouses, and planting an avenue of live oak trees leading to the house. Martha so loved her gardens that it is said she was working in them two weeks before her death in 1896, when she was eighty-seven.

It is interesting to note the wide-spread influence that Martha's immediate family had on the plantation culture of the region during these years. Martha's brother, William Ruffin Barrow, built Greenwood, one of the most spectacular Greek Revival mansions in the South. Located only a few miles from Highland and Rosedown, the house burned in 1960. Martha's uncle, Bartholomew Barrow, established the plantation at Afton Villa, still noted for its magnificent gardens. Other Barrow relatives lived at Live Oak, Solitaire, Rosale, Rosebank, Ellerslie, and Wyoming.

Martha and Daniel had three children: James, who died of yellow fever when he was seven; William, who drowned at the age of



*Four generations of the Rosedown family are shown in this remarkable photograph taken sometime in the early 1890s. Front row left to right: Rosina Bowman, Martha Bowman Fort holding her young son William Fort III, Martha Turnbull and Corrie Bowman. Back row left to right: George K. Shotwell (husband of Eliza Bowman), Isabel Bowman, Sarah Bowman, Sarah Turnbull Bowman, and James Pirrie Bowman. Martha Turnbull, the matriarch of the family, died in 1896. Her daughter Sarah and son-in-law James P. Bowman eventually inherited Rosedown; their daughter Martha was the first wife of William J. Fort Jr. of nearby Catalpa. The four unmarried Bowman daughters—Isabel, Sarah, Rosina, and Corrie—became the legendary “Bowman Ladies” who held on to their family home during the lean years of the Depression and saved Rosedown for the future.*

twenty-seven, leaving a widow and two young sons; and Sarah, who became the eventual heir and mistress of Rosedown. Sarah and her husband, James Bowman of nearby Oakley Plantation, produced ten children. Two of these children were destined to marry into the Fort family of Catalpa Plantation, a mile or so north of Rosedown.

Catalpa was established by the Fort family, who tradition says came to Louisiana in 1800 with their cousins, the Barrows. It was William Fort who built the first house at Catalpa, and his son, William Johnston Fort, who developed the plantation in the 1840s with his wife, Sallie. Together, they turned their home into a show-place set in the midst of a magnificent park. The original house, which reportedly dated from 1800, was a raised cottage with front and back galleries. The gardens contained a picturesque, winding driveway leading to the house, lined with live oak trees and bordered with conch shells. There was an artificial lake, an iron fountain depicting plunging horses, two pigeon houses, a huge deer park, and a magnificent greenhouse. Later a new bride joined the Fort family. She was twenty-two-year-old Martha Bowman, daughter of Sarah and James Bowman of Rosedown. She married William Johnston Fort Jr. in 1880 and lived at Beechwood, another Fort family residence, with him for the next eighteen years. They had two children, Martha and William. Martha Bowman Fort died in 1898 at the age of forty.

Two years later, her widower married his sister-in-law, Mary Bowman of Rosedown, who was thirty-three. This was not an unusual occurrence among plantation families, who often married cousins as well as sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law. Mary Bowman moved to Catalpa and, like her sister Martha, produced two children, Sadie and Mamie. Also like her sister, she was married to William J. Fort Jr. for eighteen years, until his death in 1918.

The original house at Catalpa was destroyed by fire in 1898 or 1899. It was replaced soon thereafter by the present house. It is now a comfortable, high-ceilinged house with a wide center hallway and a deep front gallery. The house is built on the site of the original

house, and two cast-iron English greyhounds flank the front steps just as they did when the original house stood.

The Civil War brought hard times to Rosedown and Catalpa, just as it did to other plantations throughout the South. Rosedown was invaded by federal troops, who camped in Martha's gardens, looted the house, stole all the livestock, and burned the crops and numerous outbuildings. At Catalpa, soldiers tore down gates and fences, allowing the cattle to roam freely and destroy much of the old garden. The greenhouse was ruined as well. Although the old driveway and lake are still there, the pigeon houses are gone, as well as the elegant fountain.

By the 1920s and 1930s, the Depression brought more hard times and near-poverty to many formerly-wealthy families in the region. At Rosedown, three of the unmarried Bowman daughters—Miss Sarah, Miss Rosina, and Miss Isabel—became legendary in the region for devoting their lives to the maintenance and preservation of their family home, holding on in spite of seemingly impossible odds. When the last sister, Rosina, died in 1955, she left Rosedown to her nieces and nephews debt-free.

It was in 1956, after 120 years of unbroken family occupancy, that Rosedown was sold. The new owners, Catherine and Milton Underwood of Houston, Texas, undertook an eight-year, \$11-million restoration of the property, opening it to the public full-time in 1964. The Underwood's thirty-eight-year tenure at Rosedown was a glory period for the property. Thousands of visitors from all over the world flocked through its gates to visit the mansion and stroll through its lush gardens. After his parents' deaths, the Underwood's son David held on to Rosedown until 1994, when he sold the property to a private individual. In the next seven years much of the original acreage, along with some prized furniture, was sold. At one point, the house was closed to visitors, allowing them access only to the gardens.

Before the property was sold to the State of Louisiana in November of 2000, many other Rosedown artifacts were sold at public auctions or removed, including portraits of Martha and Daniel Turnbull by



*Portrait of Sarah Turnbull by Thomas Sully in the front parlor at Catalpa Plantation.*

Thomas Sully, and all the original nineteenth-century Italian statues from the gardens.

Rosedown, now a state historic site, is maintained by a staff that includes a full-time site manager, a horticulturalist, a curator of the house, interpretive rangers, maintenance personnel, and tour guides. Open to the public once again, its future seems bright and promising.

Catalpa, like Rosedown, survived the lean years of the Depression, but unlike Rosedown, has remained in the hands of descendants of the original family. Until her death a few years ago, Mrs. Mamie Fort Thompson, great-granddaughter of Martha and Daniel Turnbull and direct descendant of the original William Fort of Catalpa, was something of a legend in her own right. “Miss Mamie” was famous for her

wonderful tours of her home whenever visitors came to call. Today, her daughter Mary owns and occupies Catalpa, cherishing her home's history, its various relics of both Rosedown and Catalpa, and its long tradition of hospitality and charm.

Among those relics at Catalpa were the receipts in this cookbook, hand-written by the ladies of Rosedown and Catalpa so long ago and now a permanent part of the histories of these two fascinating Southern plantations.

Stella Pitts



## Plantation Cooking in the Antebellum South: Its Origins and Traditions

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“Our tables were filled with every species of meat and vegetable to be found on a plantation, with every kind of cake, jellies, and blanc-mange to be concocted out of eggs, butter, and cream, besides an endless catalogue of preserves, sweetmeats, pickles, and condiments . . .”

—Letitia M. Burwell, *A Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War*, 1895

Throughout the existing literature chronicling the antebellum South—the journals, the letters, the diaries, the travelogues, the novels, and the stories—one aspect of plantation life is nearly always recalled with enthusiasm: the food.

Visitors to the South's fabled plantations, as well as the plantation families themselves, penned detailed and mouth-watering descriptions of the daily meals. They began with the first meal of the plantation day, a hearty breakfast, which usually included several hot meats—fried chicken, fried squirrel, baked hams, and grilled sausages—served with numerous hot breads, including biscuits, spoon bread, muffins, flannel cakes, and rice waffles. Also on the breakfast tables were fresh fruits, jams, jellies, and preserves.

All of this was meant to keep the diners satisfied until the main plantation meal of the day, which was nearly always served between two and four o'clock in the afternoon.

This main meal revealed plantation cooking at its most abundant and delicious. There were rich soups—oyster stews, seafood gumbos,

and bisques—and succulent salads of fresh greens, vegetables, and seafoods. Then came the meats—hams, chickens, turkeys, roast beef; many varieties of local game birds like quail, dove, and duck; and fresh fish that was baked, broiled, or stewed.

A wide assortment of vegetables from the plantation gardens filled the porcelain dishes on the tables—green peas and snap beans, turnips and tomatoes, sweet and Irish potatoes, carrots and squash, and eggplant, okra, and cucumbers.

Corn, the South's most basic staple, appeared on the plantation tables in a variety of delicious dishes—fresh on the cob, creamed in puddings, in fritters known as corn oysters, and, of course, in breads, including corn cakes, hoe cakes, corn sticks, corn pone, spoon bread, hominy bread, and crackling bread.

Rice was another Southern staple and nearly always included in plantation dinners—in jambalayas and “hopping john,” with gumbos and stews and soups, and served by itself with thick gravies and vegetable sauces.

And always there were hot breads—beaten biscuits, sweet muffins, and fresh-baked loaves dripping with butter.

Then came the desserts, and plantation memoirs seem to glow with fond descriptions of these: coconut cakes and blanc-manges, blackberry cobblers and plum puddings, trifles and custards, tarts and meringues, fruit pies and ice creams, brandied peaches and pears.

Understandably, plantation suppers were light, often simple meals of tea served with biscuits, cold meats, and small cakes.

Inevitably, the origins of Southern cuisine follow the path of Southern history. As one writer put it, “Planted in the seventeenth century, plantation society took root throughout the South in the eighteenth century and flowered in the nineteenth. . . . American cookery and hospitality reached a peak which has seldom if ever been surpassed.”

Pilgrims who flocked to the New World in the seventeenth century brought their culinary traditions with them—not only from England,



*An original Rosedown Plantation dessert service on the dining room table at Catalpa Plantation.*

Scotland, and Ireland, but also from Germany, France, Spain, and Russia. Later on, as their children and grandchildren moved from their original homesteads to the unspoiled wildernesses further South, they found mild climates and lush lands that produced abundant crops, making it possible for many of these new Southerners to build lives of wealth and elegance.

Rural life in the early South, wrote one historian, was “less hurried, less prosaically equalitarian, less futile, richer in picturesqueness, festivity, in realized pleasure that reeked not of hope or fear or unrejoicing labor.” And, he added, it was full of good things to eat and drink.

In this rural plantation society, agriculture was the basis of the flourishing economy—cotton, sugar cane, tobacco, rice, and, for a while, indigo. As they grew wealthier, Southerners bought more land,

planted more crops, accrued more wealth, built larger houses, and established plantations and family dynasties.

And, inevitably, to supply the labor for this plantation economy, Southerners imported slaves from Africa and the Caribbean Islands. In doing so, they brought to Southern plantation cuisine one of its greatest and most lasting influences—that of the unique culinary traditions of the African slave.

Ranked at the top of the plantations' slave hierarchies, the slave cooks worked under the direction of their mistresses, cooking the meals they were ordered to cook. Gradually, however, they began to add their own native touches—certain spices and vegetables and methods of their own, which were reminders of the homes they had been forced to leave behind forever. These unique methods have become the basis of today's Southern cuisine.

In *Southern Food—at Home, on the Road, in History*, author John Egerton proclaimed that “in the most desolate and hopeless of circumstances, blacks caught in the grip of slavery often exhibited uncommon wisdom, beauty, strength, and creativity. The kitchen was one of the few places where their imagination and skill could have free reign and full expression, and there they often excelled. From the elegant breads and meats and sweets of plantation cookery to the inventive genius of Creole cuisine, from beaten biscuits to bouillabaisse, their legacy of culinary excellence is all the more impressive considering the extremely adverse conditions in which it was compiled.”

Numerous foodstuffs familiar to us today were probably indigenous to Africa before European influence—rice, turnips, eggplants, okra, garlic, and peas, to name only a very few. Cooking techniques in West Africa used today in this country included steaming in leaves, frying in deep oil, toasting before the fire, and roasting in the fire itself.

African slaves brought with them to this continent such food preparation techniques as using okra as a thickener, using smoked ingredients for flavoring, creating various types of “fritters,” and

using rice as the basic ingredient of many dishes. One of the culinary traditions of slaves that is believed to have been imported from the Caribbean Islands, which remains enormously popular today, was barbecued meat.

As a result of these African and Caribbean culinary influences, traditional plantation cuisine in America became a unique blend—the heritage and traditions of the plantation owners “spiced up” by the African cooks.

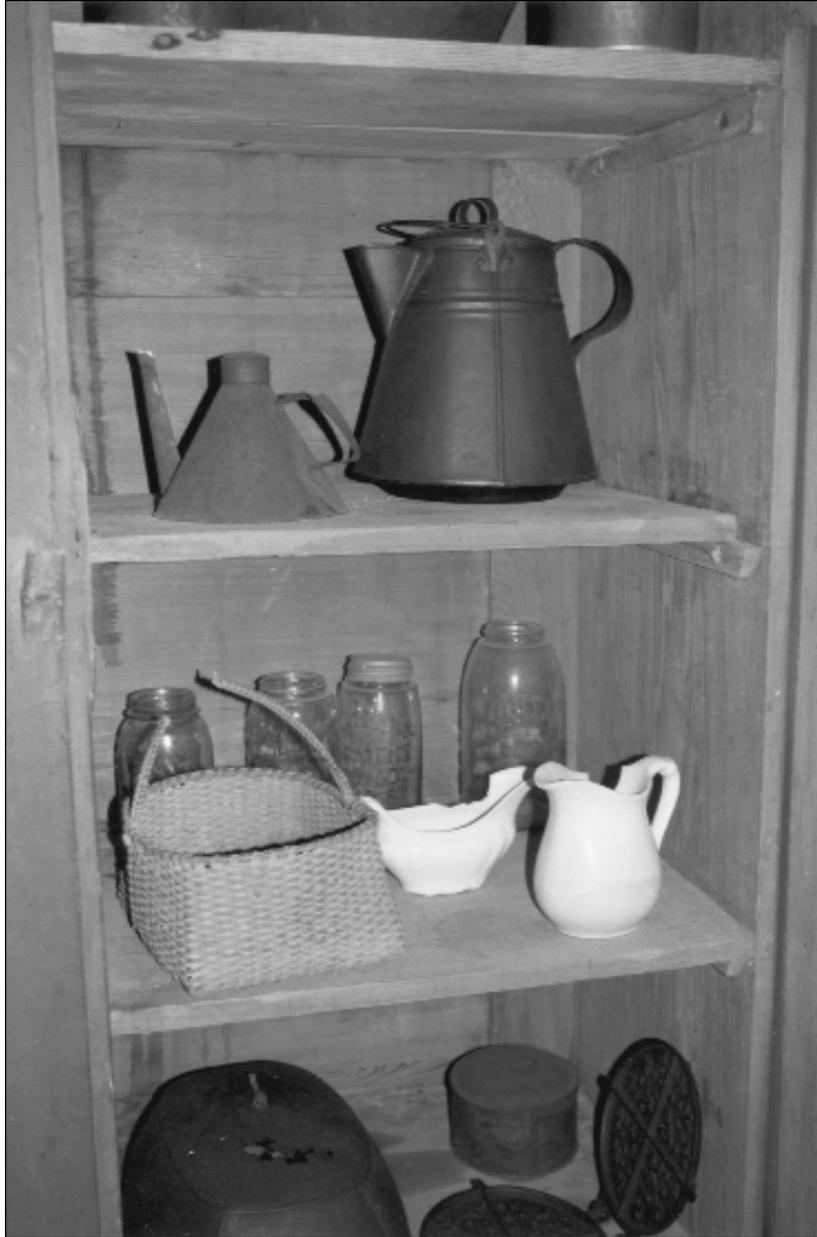
The plantation kitchen became, of course, a center of continuous activity and life. These kitchens, whether simple frame buildings or elaborate brick structures, were always located a safe distance from the plantation mansion. The reasons were simple—the danger of fire, the excessive heat from the blazing fire always kept burning in the huge fireplaces, and the smells of the cooking that continued from early in the morning until late in the evening.

The slave cooks were often formidable figures, with several underlings to assist them and numerous small children, black and white, running in and out in search of treats.

Simple cast-iron implements were used—kettles, waffle and wafer irons, gridirons, toasters, hanging griddles, frying pans, roasters and long-handled forks and spoons. Once prepared, the dishes were carried into the main house beneath tin covers, arranged on porcelain platters and in tureens and bowls, and carried into the dining room. The elaborate and delicious meals produced in these primitive plantation kitchens with these simple utensils can scarcely be imagined by modern cooks who rely on frozen foods and microwave ovens.

They must return to the volumes of plantation memoirs and search out the descriptions of the meals and food, memories that are eloquent, sometimes amusing and always fascinating.

In 1822, young John Quitman, a native of New York who studied law in Ohio and then settled in Natchez, Mississippi, wrote to his father about a New Year’s Day visit to The Forest, a plantation near Natchez.



*Inside the Rosedown kitchen cupboard. On the lower left is an original warming bell.*

On the table we had green peas, lettuce, radishes, artichokes, new potatoes, and spinach, grown in the open air, and roses, jasmines, jonquils, and pinks in profusion . . . the peach and plum are in full bloom . . .

This enthusiastic New Yorker-turned-Southerner later became a state legislator, a brigadier general in the Mexican War, and governor of Mississippi.

One of many European visitors who toured the South to study its culture and society and then write about it was the English novelist and political economist Harriet Martineau. In 1834, she visited numerous Southern plantations. She left this description of one meal she enjoyed:

The dinner is plentiful, including, of course, turkey, ham, and sweet potatoes, excellent claret, and large blocks of ice cream. A slave makes a gentle war against the flies with an enormous bunch of peacock feathers, and agitation of the air is pleasant, while the ladies are engaged in eating, so that they cannot use their own fans, which are hung by loops on the backs of their chairs.

In 1833, Henry Bernard, a twenty-two-year-old native of Connecticut and a recent graduate of Yale College, traveled south, visiting a college classmate in Charleston, South Carolina. Young Henry wrote his family about a meal he enjoyed at the home of his friend's family:

His father served up a grand dinner to a small party—first came a calves head stew as soup—then fish fried or boiled—roast veal, and ducks, with Irish and sweet potatoes—boiled rice (an article of which you can form no opinion from what we ordinarily meet with in the North) and fine bread—peas and beets—turnips and salad. Then came the dessert—another fruit—fine large oranges—pineapple—plantain and bananas (tropical fruits which I have never seen at the North but which resemble richest pear in flavor)—apples—raisins and almonds—prunes and ground nuts and to wash down the whole of each the finest claret, sherry and

madeira wine. We adjourned a little after seven after taking a good cup of coffee.

On festive occasions like Christmas and New Year's and for special events like weddings and christening parties, the plantation kitchen became a swirl of activity, and the cook called in many extra hands to help prepare the food. Letitia M. Burwell recorded this delightful description of an old-fashioned plantation wedding in antebellum Virginia:

The preparations usually commenced some time before, with saving eggs, butter, chickens, etc., after which ensued the liveliest egg-beating, butter-creaming, raisin-stoning, sugar-pounding, cake-icing, salad-chopping, cocoanut-grating, lemon-squeezing, egg-frothing, waffle-making, pastry-baking, jelly-straining, silver-cleaning, floor-rubbing, dress-making, hair-curling, lace-washing, ruffle-crimping, tarlatan-smoothing, trunk-moving-guests arriving, servants running, girls laughing . . .

In 1853, after an eight-year courtship, young Sara Hicks of Albany, New York, married Benjamin Franklin Williams, a well-to-do North Carolina planter, and moved with him to his family's plantation, Clifton Grove. She wrote her parents many letters describing her new life, which she found quite lively and very different from what she had been used to in the North. In one letter she told of the meals:

They live more heartily. There must always be two or three different kinds of meats on Mrs. Williams' table for breakfast and dinner. Red pepper is much used to flavor meat with the famous 'barbecue' of the South and which I believe they esteem above all dishes is roasted pig dressed with red pepper and vinegar. Their bread is corn bread, just meal wet with water and without yeast or saleratus, and biscuit with shortening and without anything to make them light and beaten like crackers. The bread and biscuit is always brought to the table hot . . . I wish we could send you some of our beautiful sweet potatoes and yams.

And, finally, there is this: A description of an oyster roast on Edisto Island, South Carolina, during Christmas celebrations in the 1850s. The writer is I. Jenkins Mikell, whose family had lived on the island since before 1686.

No sooner had the guests retired to the beach than a rapidly driven wagon came up with the dinner from the home kitchen, packed in extemporized 'fireless cookers,' so that it lost none of its heat, none of its savor. Lucullus [a wealthy Roman consul famous for his banquets] had nothing on it in the way of a feast. True, we did not have nightingale's tongues, but we had, to offset these, diamond-backed terrapin, which was much more sensible. And we had what I know he did not have—palmetto cabbage . . . It has the combined taste of cauliflower, burr artichoke and asparagus, with a most fascinating taste of its own. Lucullus doubtless had an orchestra. Ours was the sighing of the wind through the moss-bearded oaks; the ceaseless chatter of the palmetto fronds, the soft booming of the surf one hundred yards away, interspersed with the frequent high staccato pop of a champagne cork.

This legendary, idyllic, and almost mythical way of life on the Southern plantation disappeared forever in a civil war that many believe was lost the moment the first shot was fired. The plantation economy collapsed when the slaves were freed, planters found themselves penniless and their once-flourishing acres gone to seed, and many of the grand plantation mansions stood empty and desolate.

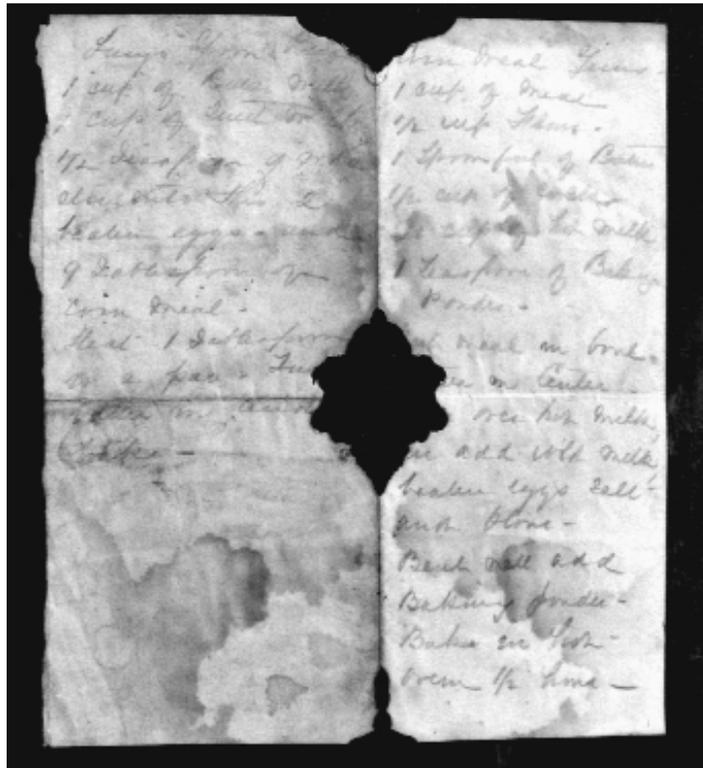
But, despite ruin and hardship and loss, Southerners held on, retaining many of their finest traditions, among them hospitality, even when there was little to put on their tables except dried peas and corn pone.

And, as they struggled to reclaim their ruined lands, rebuild their homes, and create a new South, Southerners clung to what they had left of the past—the old houses, the family pictures and books and furniture, the bits and pieces remaining of a lost way of life. Among these treasured relics were faded, hand-written recipes penned by

their wives and mothers and grandmothers. They were small but eloquent reminders of the Southern past, tiny but powerful aids in keeping the traditions of Southern cooking alive.

These rare and valuable receipts, like the Turnbull-Bowman recipes in this cookbook, serve as vivid reminders of a fabled era in American history that is long past. They also prove that as long as there are people who delight in Southern cooking—in studying it, in preparing it, or simply sitting down and eating it—the Southern past is not dead. In the words of William Faulkner—“it’s not even past.”

Stella Pitts



*A hand-written Rosedown receipt for Lucy's Spoon Bread and Corn Meal Gems.*

## Memories of Rosedown



By the time I was old enough to remember visiting my great aunts at Rosedown, they were quite elderly. My mother was close to her mother's family and would visit them often. I was probably four years old when I first remember going with her to Rosedown.

My great aunt Bella always answered the door when we came to call. She was a very slender and frail looking lady but engulfed me in the most powerful hug I've ever had. Even as a little girl, I wondered how this dainty lady had the strength to hug me so hard.

Aunt Nina was the sister who liked being outside. She could usually be found tending to plants or feeding the ducks and geese. Aunt Bella and Aunt Sadie had bedrooms upstairs but Aunt Nina's bedroom was downstairs in the back wing of the house opening to the back porch. This gave her easy access to the outdoors that she loved.

Aunt Sadie was confined to bed by the time I remember her. My mother would take me up to her room to sing my nursery school songs, and I remember her sweet smile as she patiently listened. Before I was born, Aunt Sadie was the sister who conducted tours of the plantation. She evidently established real relationships with many of the tourists who came to Rosedown and exchanged lengthy letters with them for years after.

Aunt Nina and Bella were always very neatly and sedately dressed, even when they were doing chores or working in the garden. Their dresses were usually dark with long sleeves and delicate lace



*Rosina (Nina) Bowman.*

collars—not really out of date but rather old fashioned looking, even to my childish eyes.

By the time I visited Rosedown, my great-aunts' early lifestyle had been greatly scaled down. Their meals were very simple. The cook, Charlotte, still using the outside kitchen and iron stove, would fix their midday meal, which was the main meal of the day. In the evening, they usually had just tea and toast.

I never had a chance to sample one of the famous Rosedown dinners. Rather than eating, my time at Rosedown was spent playing in the gardens if the weather was warm. Most often I played alone. Sometimes my cousins Martha and Laura, who spent summer vacations at Catalpa, would accompany me. Exploring the overgrown garden paths was a great adventure. The gardens were so large that, to a small child, it was a challenge just not to get lost. In the front garden near the house was a life size cast iron statue of an English setter. It was great fun to climb on his back and to pretend to take a ride down the oak avenue.

One of my favorite outside activities was to have tea parties in the summerhouse with my dolls. I have today the little miniature set of Blue Willow china that Aunt Nina would pack in a small basket for me to take outside to be filled with berries, flower petals and acorns. They say that smells bring back memories more than any of the other senses. I rarely smell sweet olive without remembering the gardens at Rosedown.

In the winter my mother and my great aunts would sit in front of a roaring fire in the dining room and visit. Although my great aunts never left Rosedown and appeared to be very isolated from the outside world, they were in fact, extremely well informed about current events. Each evening they listened to the radio and kept up completely with national and world-wide news.

While they, with my mother, discussed local happenings and global events, I would spend cold days in the library looking at the large volume of McKenny and Hall Indian prints. The wonderful color portraits

of Indian chiefs portrayed with painted faces, feather headdresses and bright beads were fascinating to me and I could stay absorbed in them for hours.

My mother's memories of Rosedown visits were, of course, quite different. Both of her grandparents and many of her aunts were alive when she was a child. She would go with her mother and sister every week for Sunday dinner. They would travel from Catalpa to Rosedown by carriage. The ten-minute trip by car today would take about an hour by carriage.

The dinners were very formal and would last from two o'clock until five o'clock. My mother was an active child and normally would have preferred running outside, playing in the creek or riding horseback to sitting politely at a table for three hours. She always said, however, that the food was so good she didn't mind. The meal consisted of seven courses, beginning with oyster gumbo. This would be followed by salad, red fish, turkey, vegetables, a wonderful dessert, and coffee.

My mother's grandmother, Sarah Turnbull, was the disciplinarian and thought that teaching a child good manners was very important. She believed that it was good etiquette to leave a small amount of food on one's plate rather than scraping the plate clean. She told her grandchildren they must always leave a little food on their plate for "Mr. Manners." For years, my mother thought Mr. Manners was a poor starving gardener. She was so mad when she realized she had left all of that wonderful food over the years for a man who didn't exist. My mother's grandfather, James Bowman, presided over the table, carving the large turkeys and roasts. My mother adored him. She thought he was the sweetest grandfather in the world, with his long white beard, kindly brown eyes and, usually a dog at his heels.

When four generations of family were gathered around the dinner table, there was a great sense of connection and love uniting them. Family was the center of their existence and their love of family was embedded in their home. Each object told a story, each room held a memory. It was quite a sacrifice for my great aunts over the years to keep their home completely intact and not part with anything, which



*The Rosedown dining room with its original table, chairs, clock, and punkah.*

during difficult times would certainly have made their lives easier. When Rosedown was initially sold, virtually nothing had been removed from the house in approximately 150 years.

Since that time, however, major changes have occurred at Rosedown. Fortunately, most of these have been positive ones. The house has been restored to its original splendor. The overgrown gardens that I played in as a child now look as they did when Martha Turnbull designed and planted them in the mid-1800s. Some of the objects, which over the years were removed, are now finding their way back home.

My favorite story is one about my great aunt Corrie's dog collar. Aunt Corrie was the sister who especially loved animals. Some years after she died, Aunt Nina was burning a pile of trash in the back yard. Aunt Sadie, at this time, was conducting tours of the house. A little boy, whose parents were inside having a tour, wandered into the back yard and picked up a dog collar that had fallen out of the trash pile. Aunt Nina told him he could have it. Recently, an elderly gentleman came to tour Rosedown. At the end of the tour, he pulled a dog collar out of his pocket to return to Rosedown. The collar had the names "Corrie" and "Duke" engraved on the silver plate.

In addition to stories like this, many people have purchased and donated back to Rosedown items sold at an auction held before the state bought Rosedown. For those of us with family ties to Rosedown, this is a comforting feeling.

Rosedown is now in safe hands and will be protected in years to come. I think Aunt Bella, Aunt Sadie, and Aunt Nina would be pleased.

Mary Thompson

## A Note on the Text



The following receipts have been transcribed from the original manuscripts exactly as they were written with only minor changes. Occasional misspellings were corrected, punctuation has been added where necessary for easier reading, and obscure terms have been defined.

With the exception of the receipts written by Mamie Fort Thompson of Catalpa, most were done by several of the Bowman sisters, by Martha Turnbull, and one by Sarah Turnbull Bowman at Rosedown Plantation. Although most of the receipts were written down between the 1870s and the 1920s, many date from the earliest years of the nineteenth century. Some of these were handed-down family receipts, others were their neighbors' receipts, and some were from present or past cooks. Some of these were influenced by the periodicals, newspapers, and cookbooks of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The ladies had the good habit of recording which newspaper or periodical a receipt was copied. None of the receipts designated as being copied from periodicals and newspapers were used in this work.

Modern readers will observe that many of these early receipts list only ingredients with no further instructions. It should be remembered that most early cooks were expected to know what to do with receipts—they seldom needed detailed directions. However, a number of the receipts in this book do include instructions that can be useful for all.



## Conversion Tables



### Weights and Measurements

Butter: When soft, one pound is one quart.

Eggs: Ten are one pound.

Wheat Flour: One pound is one quart.

Indian Meal: One pound, two ounces is one quart.

Brown Sugar: One pound, two ounces is one quart.

Sugar Loaf, broken: One pound is one quart.

White Sugar: One pound one ounce is one quart.

Powdered Sugar: One pound, one ounce is one quart.

Flour: Four quarts are half a peck. Sixteen quarts are half a bushel.

### Liquids

Four tablespoons are half a gill.

Eight tablespoons are one gill.

Two gills, or sixteen tablespoons, are half a pint.

Two pints are one quart.

Four quarts are one gallon.

Twenty-five drops are one teaspoon.

Four tablespoons are one wineglass.

Twelve tablespoonfuls are one teacup.

Sixteen tablespoonfuls, or half a pint, are one tumbler or coffee cup.

**Oven Temperature**

Slow oven: 275-300 degrees

Moderate oven: 325-350 degrees

Hot or quick oven: 425-450 degrees