

Foodways at Ashland

Blanc Mange without Eggs

Many of great-granddaughter Nannette's recipe books (or "receipts") are part of the Ashland collection. Along with printed recipes, these cookbooks contain many handwritten recipes from Nannette. One such recipe is for blancmange (French for "white food"), a sweet dessert made from gelatin, milk, and cream. Although not very much like the Jell-O we eat today, blancmange is a sweet jelly treat with a very long history.

Half a box of Cox's gelatine dissolved in cold water boil a pint of new milk and stir in the gelatine till it is all dissolved. Sweeten to your taste. Flavor and sweeten your cream and whip and when the gelatine congeals stir it in. Feb 1st, 1883

After the blancmange was prepared, it was poured into a special tin mold.

The mold was then refrigerated for 6-8 hours. The blancmange was removed from the mold when it was ready to serve.

Charlotte Dupuy's Roast Recipe

A Henry Clay favorite. One of the enslaved at Ashland, Charlotte Dupuy, worked in the house, took care of the children, and prepared food. Her beef roast recipe was handed down through the generations.

Rub a loin tip roast with dry mustard, pepper, and salt. Sprinkle with flour. Stick an onion with whole cloves. Brown roast in skillet. Fill an iron kettle with water and put the roast in it. Add the onion and cloves together with some caramelized sugar. Include some whole carrots. Cook slowly about 2 hours, depending on the size of the roast. Towards the end add whole onions and some small whole potatoes. The gravy should be dark brown, creamy in texture and slightly sweet.

Recipe from *Letters to Lucretia* by Louisiana Wood Simpson

Lucretia's Ice Cream with Strawberries

Taking advantage of Ashland's riches: ice kept cold in the ice houses, fresh dairy cream, eggs, and strawberries in season, Henry Clay's wife Lucretia was known to serve on her fine French dessert dishes splendid ice cream topped with strawberries. The ice cream was probably a custard mixture churned by hand in ice by the enslaved women working in Ashland's kitchen.

The Giant Artichoke

A young visitor had an especially memorable dining experience at Ashland: when seven-year-old Josephine Russell came to Ashland with her parents and a group of other adults, she recalled being welcomed by Henry and Lucretia in the dining room. Her father and

Henry Clay engaged in an animated discussion. When time for dinner, Clay asked Josephine to sit beside him at the dinner table:

“...she appreciated the honor, but was hardly prepared for it, and felt rather abashed; but , while entertaining his other guests with that brilliant playfulness which was so remarkable, would drop an occasional word into her ear and attend personally to her plate. She was beginning to feel bland and self-possessed until helped to an artichoke – something she detested – and she could not eat, although politeness seemed to require the sacrifice. In her excited state, the artichoke increased in bulk and she thought it would attract eyes to her discredit. But presto! The great man who had brought the trouble upon her removed it. ‘So you don’t like artichokes,’ he said, ‘Why, I adore them,’ and straightaway the conical, oval-scaled vegetable was appropriated to his use.”

From *Josephine Clay: Pioneer Horsewoman of the Bluegrass. Henry Clay Simpson, Jr.* (Prospect, KY: Harmony House, 2005).

What People Ate at Ashland

Archaeology is one of the most useful tools in reconstructing the daily aspects of life that don't get recorded in the written record.

Starting in 1990, archaeological digs were conducted at Ashland in various locations. Two of these locations gave great insight into what multiple generations of the family would have eaten. An excavation near the smokehouse revealed an abundance of pig, cow, and sheep remains which indicated that most of the protein in the family's diet came from animals raised on the estate. Often the archaeological record is not complete, but inferences can be made based on the remains that were found.

For example, 50% of all pig remains were of pig feet. Pig feet were a common food for both high and low economic classes. In addition to this, pig feet are an excellent source of collagen, the main ingredient in gelatin. This finding suggests that during the Clay era, gelatin desserts were a unique feature during meals.

Another excavation in the 1857 privy revealed late-19th-century remains of wild game such as rabbit, grouse, quail, and duck. This suggests that during the McDowell era hunting wild game took place on the estate. Finally, the remains of Canada Goose and Eastern Oysters in the same privy suggest food was being purchased from Lexington merchants more during this period than in earlier eras. This could be related to the rise of railroads which made shipping perishables from other locations possible.

In the same privy, an exceptional variety of seeds from edible plant species were found. This indicated that multiple generations of the family had access to a wide array of fruits and vegetables in their diet. Here is a list of species found during the excavation.

Fruits	Vegetables	Nuts and Beans
Blackberry	Tomato	Coffee
Raspberry	Peppers	Peanuts
Mulberry	Squash	Black Walnut
Melon		Butternut
Watermelon	Grains	English Walnut
Cherry	Corn	Hickory
Plum		
Peach		