



CALL FOR RECIPES!
HM'S New African American Heritage Cookbook

Inspired by our 2014 documentary project, “Community Cornerstones: African American Communities in Montgomery County, Maryland,” Heritage Montgomery is producing an accompanying African American foodways cookbook.

We are asking local communities to share their traditional recipes to be included in the cookbook and will be gathering related stories and photographs as well.

What is a heritage foodways recipe? A heritage recipe is one that originated at least 50 years ago and likely contains one or more ingredient that comes from your cultural background. The recipe is usually passed down from generation to generation – a favorite recipe of your grandmother's, like the pie she made for every holiday, or the salad your mother made for picnics, or your go-to comfort food that you remember making as a child with your uncle.

The bound cookbook will be included in Heritage Montgomery’s gift shop, but will also be available to participating communities to purchase at a significantly discounted rate to sell as a revenue stream for maintaining their historic churches and outbuildings.

We hope this cookbook will open the door for each church to think about/or continue preserving their histories and sites. Through this project, many revenue-generating programs can begin to grow – heritage cooking classes, a lecture series, or even a fundraiser cook-off between communities, just to name a few.

If you would like to learn more about this project, or have African American heritage recipes, stories, and photos you would like to share, please call us at 301-515-0753 or email director@heritagemontgomery.org.

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Heritage Montgomery African American Heritage Foodways Cookbook
Interpretive Outline

11/18/15

Introduction

In 2012, Heritage Montgomery undertook a project designed to capture and preserve the disappearing history, music, and stories of African American communities in Montgomery County. In 2014, the documentary video and accompanying gospel music CD, “Community

Cornerstones: African American Communities in Montgomery County, Maryland,” premiered to much acclaim.

During the production of “Community Cornerstones,” several issues surfaced: the need to conserve and preserve historic records, as well as to restore and preserve buildings and cemeteries; and the general loss of community,” particularly historic foodways.

In order to address these concerns and prevent further loss, Heritage Montgomery is undertaking several projects that will stabilize collections; guide preservation efforts; and gather stories, photos, and traditions that are in danger of being lost.

These projects will preserve and make available a scholarly record of the county’s rich African American history as well as provide broader, accessible resources for residents, visitors, and educators.

Heritage Montgomery intends to document the process of gathering, cataloging, inventorying, digitizing, and preserving these collections for the purpose of introducing these protocols as guides for similar projects across the State and nation.

History

Montgomery County is home to generations of African Americans, many of whom arrived in the county as enslaved persons. Working on farms and gathering in small communities, over time they were able to adapt and synthesize the existing county culinary cultures - Native American, European, and African American.

In the 1700s and early 1800s, enslaved Marylanders were often the cooks for not only their own families, but the families of landowners, thus becoming major drivers in the blending of cultures. Many African Americans had gardens where they grew produce for their own use and to be sold for extra cash. They also tended the landowners’ gardens. This crossover made the exchange and introduction of ingredients a simple matter.

Unlike other areas of the country, Maryland’s mild climate, waterways, and abundant game made supplementing food allowances easy – oysters, fish, waterfowl, and other game were accessible to everyone. This diversity of ingredients and culture allowed a distinct regional food tradition to emerge.

While Sandy Spring’s Sharp Street Methodist Church was founded in 1822 by former slaves freed by the Society of Friends (a.k.a. Quakers), most church communities grew up after Emancipation, in 1864. Freed slaves purchased property and erected community buildings. These sites often contained three structures – church, school, and community building – and were surrounded by homes of the families who supported the church community.

As the center of the community, special occasions were celebrated in these buildings – weddings, funerals, holidays, and Homecomings – and nearly all featured a banquet of one kind or another serving the true comfort foods of the African American culture.

While many of the historic African American churches remain, most are seeing declining membership and aging infrastructure. These communities are, in a way, victims of their own success. As children were raised in tight communities, learning values and attending the community schools, they became more successful and moved away to areas that could provide better job opportunities.

These children grew to be the organizers of the defeat of Jim Crow, segregation, and the founders of the Civil Rights Movement – all legacies that can be traced back to the beliefs and values of the historic African American communities.

Significance

Maryland “subsistence” foodways provide a unique culinary experience. The blending of imported African American ingredients and cooking techniques with Maryland’s Native American and European cultures, as well as local produce, fish, and game, all give rise to a novel foodways tradition in the mid-Atlantic region.

But as communities disband, the risk of losing these historic recipes and their historic connection to our culture is imminent.

These food traditions are the jumping off point for what we think of as traditional American foodways – Creole, New Orleans, Southern, Low Country, and Soul Food. The current interest in food and heritage foodways makes this an excellent time to gather recipes and develop programs that encourage tourism and provide a revenue stream for stewardship and preservation of these endangered sites/communities.

Across all cultures, sharing a meal is a hallmark of human interaction. In the days of slavery, preparing and serving a meal took on profound meaning for those who may not have been able to share daily community with family. During segregation, community celebrations, including Homecomings and Juneteenth, were an opportunity to be with family and friends without the rigors of harsh rules. In the 1960s, these gatherings provided a platform for the exchange of ideas about Civil Rights.

As food is central to cultural identity, preserving these recipes adds to the fabric and content of African American history in Montgomery County.

Goals

Goal 1 – To gather and preserve historic Montgomery County African American recipes and related stories

Goal 2 – To make these historic recipes and stories available to the public

Goal 3 – To print a cookbook to be sold at community gatherings, churches, and heritage gift shops that will produce a revenue stream for the county’s endangered African American sites

Goal 4 – To add breadth and depth to Montgomery County’s existing African American tourism offerings and build a connection to the histories shared in the “Community Cornerstones” project

Goal 5 – To provide a template for other county groups to use in preserving their traditional foodways

Goal 6 – To provide a reference and anchor for future programming

Recommendations

Gather recipes

Gather accompanying stories and photos

Research recipes

Test recipes

Design and print a traditional low-cost church cookbook

Partner with MNCPPC and others to do a foodways demonstration – cake walks, hearth cooking, corn grinding – roll out for Emancipation Day 2016

Encourage the churches to produce their own heritage food programs, such as Sunday suppers open to the public, a countywide cook-off competition among the churches, cooking classes, and other revenue producing programs

African Imports (some through Asia and South America):

Okra

Butter Beans

Red Beans

Lima Beans

Peanuts

Rice

Sesame

Sorghum

Tomatoes

Yams

Watermelon

Squash and pumpkins

Black eyed peas

Collards

Deliverables

African American Heritage Cookbook

Programs relating to heritage foodways at sites

Revenue generating classes and programs

Tours relating to foodways