

Hoggard, Helen: Salt Pork And Cracklings ^[1]

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Helen Hoggard: Salt Pork And Cracklings

by David Cecelski. "[Listening to History](#) ^[2]," *News & Observer*. Published 1/13/2008. Copyrighted. Reprinted with permission.

I recently visited Helen Hoggard to learn about old-fashioned hog killings. Born in 1917, she grew up on a farm in Bertie County, 120 miles east of Raleigh. Pork was the cornerstone of Southern cooking, and hog killings were a wintertime ritual on farms across the region. Before refrigeration, salting, smoking and pickling pork were also essential arts. Mrs. Hoggard learned them young and practiced them nearly all her life. Now 91 years old, she only recently stopped using her own smokehouse.

I talked with Mrs. Hoggard at her home in Aulander, a little one-stoplight town in Bertie County's northwest corner.

In Helen Hoggard's words:

My daddy's name was Jappeth Thomas. Jappeth is a name out of the Bible, but everybody called him "Jeppy." He raised tobacco, peanuts, cotton and corn, and we had hog killings every single year.

He had a big pasture and it had hogs in it. He usually raised Poland Chinas. They were short, stumpy, black and white hogs. They would eat anything in the world that was on the ground.

At hog-killing time, he'd shoot them in the head and he had a vat to put them in. He'd build a fire under it. He'd scald the pigs in the boiling water, take them out and scrape the hair off them.

My daddy had a railroad iron hanging in the yard, and he would hang the hogs up on that. They'd have to stay out there and chill all night, because they would cut out better when it got real cold. You could not kill a hog in hot weather because

Next morning, he'd get up early, go out and start cutting them out. The women would spread the meat on a table in the yard. Not the hams and shoulders -- my daddy would take them to the smokehouse and salt them down.

The women would cut out the lard and fix the sausage meat. We would take that lean meat and put it in a big tub. We had to grind that up and season it and stuff the chitterlings, the little intestines, with that sausage.

You seasoned the sausage either hot or mild. You raised your red pepper in the garden, and you'd take it in the house and parch it. You had to raise sage in a rotten stump that's the best way to raise sage. And you put rosemary in your lard.

Preparing the chitterlings was a job. You'd wash out the inside in a swamp or somewhere you had running water. Then you'd bring them back to the house and scrub them good to make them nice and clean. You'd scrape out all that inside.

A lot of people take the hog head and make their souse. You put salt and pepper and vinegar on it and cut it into little blocks and put it up in jars. You'd have it all the year through. I've got some souse in there right now.

My mama -- her name was Daisy -- used to make hers out of the pig's feet, nose, ears. You pickle it in vinegar. You'd eat it with your greens out of the garden in the summertime.

You'd take your bacon and put it in great big barrels of salt. You'd put water in a barrel and put salt in until it would float an egg. And then you'd put your side meat in it. They called that salt pork.

And, oh yes, you ate the organs, too the liver, the heart, the stomach, the lights . They wouldn't keep. The pancreas is good, too you fry it or boil it. Brains, too. You skin the brains and wash out all the crinkles and you scramble them with egg

I love the skins. And we'd use the pig tails for seasoning. And backbones -- we used to salt them down in the smokehouse. You'd put them in a pot and boil them with your greens and they were delicious.

The fat makes the cracklings. That's what's left when you make your lard. I don't like to eat them by themselves, but I like to make crackling bread.

To make your crackling bread, you just put in meal and a little flour and some of your cracklings and bake it in the oven and it's delicious.

Dandoodle, or tom thumb, was made out of the end of the big gut, the last part of the big intestine. You would save that big gut and stuff it with sausage. Then you tied a string around it and hung it up in the smokehouse. My daddy loved tom

My mama also made what you called lye soap out of the lard. You couldn't go to the store and buy soap like you can now.

In the smokehouse, you started off first with lightwood. When the lightwood burned off, you used hickory wood. Hickory simmers; it doesn't blaze. You shut the door so it will keep the smoke in there. And you have a little iron pot with a hole in

The ham has to stay in salt for 21 days. Then you get a tub of water and you wash the ham. Dry it off, put your molasses on it, sprinkle it with pepper and hang it up. Then you smoke it if you want. Some people like the taste of smoking. It kee

You gave the helpers some of everything you had -- the liver, some spare bones, sausage, spare ribs.

Let me tell you something. When they were making the lard, the first thing the helpers would do is put on a pound of sweet potatoes to cook. Then, when the cracklings came off, they would eat those cracklings and sweet potatoes. Oh, they t

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