

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Hefty Hogs

Once a "long-standing tradition, now extinct," hog killings in rural America "remained a way of life into the '50s," according to columnist Loran Smith of the *Athens Banner-Herald* (2021). The custom back in the day was graphically, but aptly described by culinary historian Michael W. Twitty:

"Hog killing was a very intricate ritual no matter where in the South you lived....It is no longer performed as a communal rite of subsistence and necessity. You can still attend an occasional *boucherie* or hog killing here and there, but it's not the same as the days when one farm and then the next would shift operations from place to place, with a small feast for all those gathered to do the work of slaughtering, bleeding, singeing or boiling to remove the hair, scraping the hog, hanging it up by the flap of flesh behind the feet, making the cut from the bung to throat, catching and cleaning the guts, tending the head, and then finally processing the meat and lard into distinct portions—the hams, the bacon and belly, leaf lard for baking, shoulders, side meat, feet, headcheese, sausage, and the bits that could either be preserved or left behind—the chittlins or chitterlings (the small intestine), spareribs, the chine—the backbone, feet, neckbone, tail, and brains. Some people made blood pudding, and others eschewed that and let it seep into the ground. Anything left over was given to the dogs that surely gathered for the leavings." (*Afroculinaria*, 2013)

Truly a tradition of the past, you would be hard-pressed to find a hog killing in greater La Grange today. In the late nineteenth century, however, Bucklesberrians routinely produced hefty hogs for hog killings:

1882, December 14: "Julius E[ri] Sutton killed a hog last Friday which weighed 570 pounds. That lays Jake's big one in the shade, but the Captain's rice heads none can beat." (*New Berne Weekly Journal*)

1882, December 21: "Joe [Josiah, Sr.] Sutton stands second best on heavy hogs. One killed on Friday the 8th, inst., weighed 528 pounds." (*New Berne Weekly Journal*)

1883, January 23: "That famous and self-sustaining section, Bucklesberry, is now showing itself in the meat business. I learn from Thomas Sutton, of that place, that a number of hogs have been killed the past week, all of them very fine. Twenty-five head slaughtered by him averaged 171 lbs., net." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern)

1884, February 20: "Jerry [Jeremiah, Sr.] Sutton, of Bucklesberry, killed a porker last Friday, two years old, which weighed, net, 680 pounds, and there is no telling how much more he would have weighed, for this was the full capacity of the steelyards." (*The Weekly Star*, Wilmington)

1896, December 19: "Mr. B[en] H. Sutton and William [Billy] Sutton, of Bucklesberry, near La Grange, killed two hogs this week weighing 1,262 pounds net. These pigs were a gift from our old friend drummer, 'Sandy' Smith, of Greensboro. These pigs were 24 months old." (*News and Observer*, Raleigh)

More about hefty hogs in the next Bucklesberry article.