

"Pappy" Faulkner's Recipe for Curing Pork

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In late December 1941, William Fielden returned from China to the United States. His destination was Oxford, Mississippi and Rowan Oak, home of William and Estelle Faulkner. In Shanghai in July 1940, Bill Fielden had married Victoria Franklin, Estelle's daughter and Faulkner's stepdaughter. Shortly after this marriage, the Japanese threat of war had increased, and in late 1940 all American women and children were advised to leave the country; Fielden's new bride and his adopted daughter, also named Victoria, were evacuated. Mother and daughter traveled unescorted to Mississippi, while Fielden remained at his job with the British American Tobacco Company.

Estelle and William and their eight-year-old daughter Jill eagerly awaited the appearance of the new bridegroom, whom they had not met. On his arrival at Rowan Oak, an instant rapport developed between Bill Fielden and "Pappy" (as Faulkner readily instructed Fielden to call him). Fielden was unpretentious, and his gentle personality also immediately captivated Jill and her mother. The Fieldens resided with the Faulkners for several months, while Fielden alternated between job-hunting, trying to enlist in the armed services, and working as a "field hand" at Rowan Oak. Until Faulkner's death in 1962, Rowan Oak would be "home" for the Fieldens whenever they visited the United States on vacation.

In January 1942, while Bill Fielden was getting acquainted with routines observed in Oxford, and especially at the Faulkner residence on Garfield at the edge of town, he witnessed for the first time a pig being killed, butchered, and prepared for curing.¹ His father-in-law, William Faulkner, assisted by the black retainers Prince and Ned Barnett, was in charge of the ceremony. Fielden was so intrigued by this procedure that he asked Pappy to type out for him his own personal "recipe" (as he referred to it from that day forth) for curing pork.²

Pappy Faulkner obliged his son-in-law, as much as an expedient measure as out of cordial compliance. His books had failed to provide him with financial security, and Faulkner was keenly sensitive to his own precarious situation: any day he might be forced to accept war work far from Oxford or be called away to fight for his country. In point of fact,

he could imagine Bill Fielden assuming the role of provider for his household. And, indeed, by the end of July 1942, Faulkner would be behind a desk in Burbank, California, fighting for his country by writing war propaganda film scripts for Warner Bros. Although Faulkner could not predict this imminent change of circumstances in early 1942, he could and did feel compelled to instruct his son-in-law in the necessary realities of self-reliance: maintaining a Victory garden, raising poultry, keeping a milk cow, and "Curing Hams Shoulders Bacon."³

¹Six years later, Faulkner would compose a mood set-piece for the opening of his new novel, *Intruder in the Dust*, which, through the eyes of twelve-year-old Chick Mallison, describes the ubiquitous occupation engaging the country populace outside Jefferson, Mississippi, at the time of "the first winter cold-snap...from the first farmyard they passed and then again and again and again came the windless tang of woodsmoke and they could see in the back yards the black iron pots already steaming while women...stoked wood under them and the men...whetted knives or already moved about the pens where hogs grunted and squealed, not quite startled, not alarmed but just alerted as though sensing already even though only dimly their rich and immanent [sic] destiny; by nightfall the whole land would be hung with their spectral intact tallowcolored empty carcasses immobilised by the heels in attitudes of frantic running as though full tilt at the center of the earth." (*ID*, 4)

²This single-spaced, single-page manuscript, typed by Faulkner, and published for the first time in this article, remained in the possession of William and Victoria Fielden until 1975, when it and other family effects became the property of Victoria Fielden Johnson. In May 1985, Mrs. Johnson made legal disposition of her inherited Faulkner archive by placing it in the Louis Daniel Brodsky Faulkner Collection on deposit at the Kent Library of Southeast Missouri State University at Cape Girardeau, Missouri.

I am grateful to Mrs. Johnson for placing such confidence in me, and to Mrs. Jill Faulkner Summers for allowing me to publish this and other documents which have appeared or will be published subsequently in volumes comprising *Faulkner: A Comprehensive Guide to the Brodsky Collection*, co-edited by Robert W. Hamblin, and published by the University Press of Mississippi.

³In a letter to me dated August 5, 1986, Victoria Fielden Johnson wrote: "...virtually all of the food served at Rowanoak in the forties derived from hunting, fishing, hog-and chicken-raising, and vegetables and fruit grown there (and canned or preserved by Grandmama [Estelle]). Of course, some items, such as coffee, rice, sugar, etc. had to be bought at the store, but most came from the land and its animals."

CURING HAMS SHOULDERS BACON

After the pieces are trimmed and thoroughly cooled, either by 24 hours of natural temperature or by artificial temperature NOT LOW ENOUGH TO FREEZE IT, that is, about 35 degrees F.

Lay the pieces flat, flesh side up, cover thoroughly with plain salt, about 1/4 inch deep. Work saltpeter into the bone-joints and into the ends where the feet were removed, and into any other crevices or abrasions. Do this well and carefully, to prevent 'blowing'. A slightly higher temperature will help the salt penetrate. Leave 24 hours.

After 24 hours, turn the pieces over SKIN SIDE UP, to drain. Sprinkle skin side with salt. I punch holes through the skin with an ice pick, to help draining. Leave 24 hours.

After 24 hours, turn the pieces flesh side up again, make a paste

1/2 plain salt

1/2 molasses, sugar, red and black pepper

just moist enough to spread over the pieces without flowing off. Leave 7 days.

After 7 days, make a paste

1/4 plain salt

3/4 molasses, sugar, red and black pepper

slightly more fluid than the first mixture, so that it will flow slowly over the pieces, penetrating the remains of last week's treatment, dripping down the sides. Leave 7 days.

After 7 days, make a paste WITHOUT SALT

molasses, sugar, red and black pepper

fluid enough to cover the pieces without flowing off too much, cover the pieces and the residue of the two former treatments, leave seven days.

Hang the pieces and smoke with hickory or oak chips, keep it in smoky atmosphere for 2 to 7 days. The meat may be treated either before smoking or afterward with a preparation to prevent blow flies. Then wrap or enclose in cloth or paper bags and leave hanging until used.