

# Tracing Pasts: Genealogists can feed hunger for recipes

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I had the great good fortune to be an active member of the Bay County Genealogical Society in Panama City for many years and served quite a few as president. I still remember one meeting I ran when the discussion turned to favorite family recipes.

Our membership was typical of most societies; some folks talked and some were listeners. Well, this night it was like a floodgate had opened. Memory after memory was shared by everyone there, all centering on the foods of our childhoods. I later wrote a column about the experience, and it was one of the few ever picked up for wider distribution nationwide. Obviously this was a subject dear to many hearts.

This time of year we tend to pull out those meaningful recipes. We fill our homes with the delicious smells and tastes we've known since we were small. Hopefully you enjoy these recipes with close and extended family and perhaps some friends as well. But do you also share the history behind them? Do you tell the stories of the times you shared these goodies with those family members no longer with us? Have you taken the time to write down favorite recipes that just exist in your memory?

As genealogists we work hard to save our family records and photographs. We can preserve so much more. A wonderful gift to those you love would be a collection of these family recipes. This can be as simple as a notebook with handwritten entries or as fancy as a scrapbook presentation complete with photos and some family history thrown in. What about a recipe box filled with cards of meaningful recipes?

However you choose to share these recipes, do consider writing some or all by hand. I treasure recipes I have, splattered with cooking stains as they are, that my grandmother and mother wrote out for me. When I pull them out, I feel so close to them. I remember the times we cooked together and ate together. Both of these women were great cooks, and I wish I had inherited that talent. It turns out that my daughter is a great cook as well, and I hope she'll remember with joy the times we have made these dishes together. I know I will.

If you also cook with others, especially children, ask them what recipes they would like to have. Their answers might surprise you. Their happy memories may involve recipes so simple that you never thought to write them down. Family history is made up of the collective memories of every family member, and the good times and tastes that they remember will be with them all their lives. Preserve in writing these important family documents, these recipes. Record their history in your genealogy files. We cannot actually sit down at the table with our ancestors, but enjoying the same meals that they did can help us feel our common heritage.