

# Jim Casada Outdoors

## November 2013 Newsletter

*Supplemental Edition*

Jim Casada  
1250 Yorkdale Drive  
Rock Hill, SC 29730-7638  
803-329-4354

Web site: [www.jimcasadaoutdoors.com](http://www.jimcasadaoutdoors.com)  
E-mail: [jc@jimcasadaoutdoors.com](mailto:jc@jimcasadaoutdoors.com)

*[Click here to view this newsletter in a .pdf with a white background for easy printing.](#)*

### November Nostalgia (and Noshing), Part II

First of all, before some word Nazi calls me to task, let me indicate that I know noshing means snacking or eating between meals. However, I'm so fond of alliteration, and since the word does apply to eating, I simply couldn't resist using it here. With that bit of absolutely useless trivia out of the way, let's get down to serious culinary business.

This is the first of a planned monthly series of what might be styled supplementary newsletters. In large measure they will focus on food folkways, eating traditions as I have known them, foods from nature, and recipes. I'll also try to throw in a food tip or two—maybe on storage, preparation, growing something in the garden, or something else along that line. However, I'm enough of a sentimentalist, not to mention being decidedly old-fashioned, to know that there will inevitably be a bit of warm reminiscence and longing looks back to foodstuffs and food folkways from the past. To give the mid-month offerings a bit of variety, I also plan to offer a short overview on an author whose work has given me pleasure. Many of those covered will be outdoor writers, but I'll range farther abroad to cover novelists, biographers, and even a poet or two. Indeed, this month's choice is a poet, Robert Service.

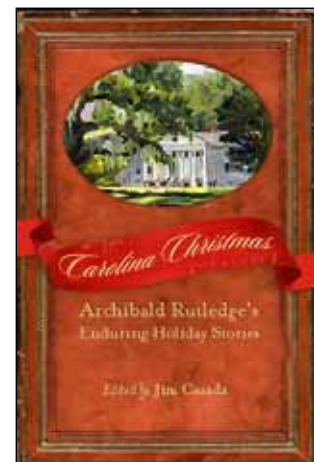
This month we'll get started along the pretty obvious path of dishes connected with Thanksgiving. As my newsletter at the beginning of the month suggested, in my boyhood days the holiday was special in a lot of ways, and so it remains in my family today. It's a time to eat too much, burn off some calories by walks in the woods for the menfolk and shopping sprees for the womenfolk, and generally enjoy the simple pleasures of togetherness and a time where the next deadline, the next stressful situation connected with work, is put aside.

#### Christmas Time's A-Coming

By the time you read this there will be roughly five shopping weeks left until Christmas.

Perhaps one of the various books I've written or edited—mayhap a cookbook, an anthology of one of the great sporting writers, a treasured out-of-print item, or an original work from yours truly—will fit the bill as a gift for sporting friends and family.

Visit my [Web site](#) and check out what's on offer. I'll have detailed information on gift suggestions in the December newsletter.



Tel.: 803-329-4354  
E-mail: [jc@jimcasadaoutdoors.com](mailto:jc@jimcasadaoutdoors.com)

The recipes which follow are all for dishes which have long been an integral part of the season in my family, and mayhap you'll want to sample and savor one or two of them.

[Back to Top](#)

## CHESTNUT DRESSING

Both my father and grandfather frequently spoke of the "good old days" when the American chestnut was the dominant tree in the Appalachians as well as a dominant force in their economic well being. Grandpa Joe cut the trees for "acid wood" (the product was used in tanneries), fence rails, roof shingles, and rough lumber for building barns and outhouses. Each autumn when the nuts were ripe and falling from their protective burrs, the entire family would set out on all-day nutting expeditions. They collected bushels of the sweet, rich nuts. Some were for family use—eaten raw, roasted, boiled, and consumed in other ways. Much of the harvest, however, was sold for what grandpa always called cash money. Chestnuts were popular far in big cities, where vendors sold them, piping hot, on street corners and other busy locations.

The meaty, nutritious nuts were also an important foodstuff for fattening hogs, and traditional killing and butchering time came shortly after what might have been called chestnut season. That found the pigs well fattened from free-ranging consumption of chestnuts, and often as a youngster I heard old-timers say: "You've never tasted fine pork until you've eaten a chestnut-fattened hog."

In addition to their many other uses, the nuts furnished food for wild game, and in that regard squirrels were especially noteworthy. Grandpa would wax eloquently and emotionally on sitting beneath a mighty chestnut and killing a dozen bushytails in no time at all, although he would also note that you had to pick your set-up spot with care. "Some of those trees were so tall a man's shotgun wouldn't even reach the top limbs," he would say.

By the time I was born, the dominant tree of the eastern forests was already long gone. Most of the trees in the Smokies of my boyhood died in the late 1920s, but the family kept up a long-established tradition by substituting the meat of Chinese chestnuts (which are tasty but come in a remote second to the American variety) for the real thing in dressing. Here's the recipe used by Grandma Minnie and Mom, and it is now the one my wife prepares. Incidentally, if you don't have access to chestnuts just substitute pecans. Here's the recipe.

6-8 cups cornbread crumbs (homemade cornbread is infinitely preferable to using purchased crumbs, and that is doubly so if it is made with stone-ground meal. Using buttermilk to make the cornbread makes it much lighter).

½ cup butter

Place the butter in a skillet and add:

1 cup cooked chestnuts  
1 cup finely diced celery  
1 cup finely chopped onion

Cook slowly over low heat for 10 minutes. Stir frequently as it burns easily. Add this to cornbread crumbs and mix well. Add 2 eggs well beaten and 2 cups turkey or chicken broth (or stock). Add more liquid if necessary as the mixture must be very moist. Season to taste with salt, black pepper, sage (if you like it—I don't and it is a dominant taste), Montreal Chicken Seasoning, or whatever you prefer).

Bake at 350 degrees for 40-45 minutes.

## GIBLET GRAVY

While I thoroughly enjoy dressing with a slice of turkey or by itself, it really cries out for a lavish ladle of giblet gravy spooned over it. I'll leave the gravy making details to your individual tastes, but I do have a suggestion

that will make it meatier and better. The next time you kill a wild turkey, save not only the giblets (heart, liver, and gizzard) but all of the dark meat (legs, thighs, wings, and medallions on the back). Place the dark meat in a large stock pot and keep it simmering for at least a couple of hours. The meat will never get really tender, but it will reach a point where you can remove it from the bones. Do so, and keep the stock as well. Chopped into small pieces and frozen with the giblets (add them in the final half hour of simmering), you have the makings of giblet gravy richly laced with nutritious bits of wild turkey. Combine it with some of the stock you saved and the juices from your baked domestic turkey, and you can produce an abundance of gravy and have the good feeling associated with fully utilizing your wild bird.

## PUMPKIN CHIFFON PIE

This pie has long been a favorite in my family. Both my mother and an aunt made it, although with slightly different approaches. No Thanksgiving or Christmas at our home was considered complete without “punkin pie,” and Mom always prepared at least three or four of them. They disappeared in no time. We used pumpkins grown in our garden, and the time involved in preparing them (cutting up, removing seeds, peeling, and then stewing) was taken for granted. After all, they cost nothing, were the essence of freshness, and properly stored pumpkins kept right through the winter. This recipe is Mom’s version.

Prepare and bake a nine-inch pie shell.

Soak 1 tablespoon gelatin in  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup cold water and set aside

Beat 3 egg yolks slightly

Add:

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup sugar

1  $\frac{1}{4}$  cups pumpkin

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup milk

$\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt

$\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon cinnamon

$\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon nutmeg (freshly grated is best)

Cook and stir these ingredients constantly over hot water until they are thick. Stir in the soaked gelatin until it is dissolved. Cool.

Whip 3 egg whites and  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt until stiff. When the pumpkin mixture begins to set up, stir in  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup sugar and fold in the whipped egg whites. Fill the bake pie shell and chill the pie for several hours. Serve with whipped cream (the real McCoy if at all possible).

## STACK CAKE

Also known as applesauce cake and wedding cake, stack cakes are perhaps the most beloved of all mountain desserts. Mountain cooks took considerable pride in their stack cakes, and one of less than five layers was considered an inferior effort. Grandma Minnie’s always ran to seven layers—thin, evenly spread with filling between each layer, and so scrumptious they invariably evoked the ultimate words of culinary praise from Grandpa Joe: “Mighty fine, mighty fine!”

The filling varied, although applesauce was the most popular. At various times Grandma also used peach “sauce,” blackberry jam, blackberry jelly, and other types of fruit preserves including those featuring dewberries, wild strawberries, and elderberries. To my way of thinking (well, actually my way of tasting), there was nothing to quite match dewberry jam filling.

Cake Mix

4 cups plain flour  
 1 teaspoon salt  
 ½ teaspoon soda  
 2 teaspoons baking powder  
 ¾ cup shortening (or lard)  
 1 cup sugar  
 1 cup blackstrap molasses (any cane syrup will do, but dark molasses has a more piquant taste)  
 1 cup milk  
 3 eggs

### Filling

3 cups sweetened applesauce or the equivalent of other types of filling (applesauce will mix, mingle, and marry with the layers of cake a bit better than jelly or jam)

Sift flour, salt, soda, and baking powder. Cream the shortening and then add a little sugar at a time, blending well as you go. Add molasses and mix thoroughly. Then add milk and eggs, one by one, beating the mixture until smooth. Pour a small amount (1/4 to 1/3 inch) of batter into greased 9-inch pans and bake until golden brown. Cool and stack the layers, adding applesauce or jam between each layer as you go.

Stack cake is best eaten at least a day after it has been made, simply because allowing it to “set up” a bit enables to fruit mixture to infuse into the layers of cake.

Right up until her final year or so of life, which found Grandma Minnie quite frail and worn out from a hard life which had known plenty of work and had been wonderfully well lived, I could count on her having a stack cake for me anytime she got word I would be coming home from college, the prep school where I taught for three years, or graduate school. Anticipation of that treat always reached out to me with the same sort of heart-grabbing grasp as the allure of the mountains.

### FRIED PIES

Also known by such delightful colloquial names as “half moons” and “mule ears,” fried pies were standard dessert fare throughout my youth, and they remain something I regard as toothsome to the nth degree. The only forms I have ever eaten featured fillings of stewed apples, peaches, or apricots, although there’s no reason they couldn’t be prepared out of other dried fruits such as raisins or prunes (personally though, I’ll pass on the latter). In every case the fruit to be used for filling is dried, and in my experience apples are far and away the most common.

Cover a pound of dried fruit in water and let it soak overnight. Drain, add a small amount of fresh water, and stew until tender, mashing the fruit as it cooks. Add ½ to ¾ cup sugar, depending on personal tastes and factors such as whether the dried apples, if that is what is being used, were sweet or tart. Stir in the sugar along with 2 tablespoons of butter and cinnamon to taste. Allow to cool while making pie crust.

For the crust, use your favorite homemade one, but cut the amount of lard or shortening used by half. Cut into circles of 4 to 6 inches in diameter and place a hefty dollop of the stewed fruit on one side of the circle. Fold over to make the half-moon shape and seal with a fork. Fry in piping hot lard, turning only once. When browned, remove and place on paper towels. Dust with brown sugar and, if you want even more richness, drop on a dab of butter while the pies are piping hot.

We ate stacks of these delicacies, and they are almost as good left over, whether re-warmed or eaten cold, as when just out of the frying pan. On days when I hurried home to go squirrel hunting, I would tuck two or three fried pies carefully wrapped in wax paper into a pocket of my Duxbak jacket. Munching of one while meditating and waiting quietly for a bushytail to appear was pure heaven, and safe or not I washed them down from mountain springs without a second thought (or any harm).

[Back to Top](#)

## Author of the Month Robert Service

It's strange how our memories pick up selective tidbits which stick with us through the years. I don't remember a great deal about my education as a 7<sup>th</sup> grader, other than having a first-rate teacher who could tell Edgar Allen Poe stories in a manner which would scare the bejeebers out of you. Oddly enough, my other powerful memory relates to another 7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher who was a master at poetry recitations. One day, as a special treat, he gave us a full and powerful rendering of a poem, "The Cremation of Sam McGee," by the individual sometimes known as the "Bard of the Yukon," Robert Service.

An Englishman by birth, Service (1874-1958) moved to Canada while a young man and pursued a variety of menial jobs before becoming a banker even as he began to dabble in poetry. That in due course led to his first book of poems, *Songs of a Sourdough* (the American title was *The Spell of the Yukon and Other Verses*). The work sold wonderfully well, eventually earning the equivalent of several million dollars in today's money. Other collections, including *Ballads of a Cheechako*, *The Trail of '98* and *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone*, followed. In 1909, while living in Dawson, Service resigned his bank position, and in 1912 he left Dawson City for good. Most of the remainder of his life would be spent in France.

Aesthete intellectuals of his day characterized Service's poetry as rank doggerel, but he had great appeal for the common man and was sometimes known as "the Canadian Kipling." In his autobiography, Service said "Verse, not poetry, is what I was after." He was seeking to pen "something the man in the street would take notice of and the sweet old lady would paste in her album; something the schoolboy would spout and the fellow in the pub would quote." Had he added "something which would be recited in thousands of backwoods hunt camps and around tens of thousands of remote campfires" he would have captured the essence of his appeal.

Service at his best has a sing-song rhythm and internal rhyme which is soothing to the ear and captivating to the mind. Far from being "squalid," "sordid," "gross," "bestial," or "inferior," all terms critics used to assail him, to me poems like "The Cremation of Sam McGee," "The Shooting of Dan McGrew," "The Call of the Wild," and "The Men That Don't Fit In" are exercises in pure delight. By way of sharp contrast, much of what passes for fine poetry today seems to me meaningless, stilted, lacking in any hint of rhythm, and often as fine a way to treat insomnia as is imaginable. If you aren't familiar with Service, get a copy of his *Collected Poems* or one of his books. I think you will be delighted.

[Back to Top](#)

*Thank you for subscribing to the Jim Casada Outdoors newsletter.  
Feel free to contact Jim with your comments, questions or suggestions at [jc@jimcasadaoutdoors.com](mailto:jc@jimcasadaoutdoors.com).*

[Home](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Links](#)

[Search](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Archives](#)

Send mail to [webmaster@jimcasadaoutdoors.com](mailto:webmaster@jimcasadaoutdoors.com) with questions or comments about this Web site.  
Copyright © 2004-2011 JimCasadaOutdoors.com. Last modified: 11/17/13.  
Web site design by Wordman, LLC