

Food Fondly Remembered...

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Images may differ from those in the original article.

EvelynRuth Ragan wrote this short essay about her food-related memories growing up in the 1950s and 1960s at the home of her parents, Calvin and Edith Ragan, near New Hill. Can you relate her memories to your own, or to those of family members and friends?

There have been a lot of changes in the Triangle area of North Carolina in recent years. One of the biggest is actually the food—the way it’s prepared, where it comes from, and how it tastes. When I was growing up, most vegetables were grown on the farm and preserved by canning or freezing. They were cooked adequately, with proper seasoning. Momma’s “snap beans” (now called string beans or green beans) always tasted better than others. My aunt Irma Holland, who taught biology at Broughton High School in Raleigh, said the beans were better because of the balance in the soil in New Hill. The “sweet corn” from the garden was always sweet and tender. It was different from the corn Daddy raised for silage. He grew many acres each year for the cows. Momma made all the jellies, jams, and pickles.

Some things like sweet potatoes, cucumbers, collards, turnips, and so forth, we would buy at “pick your own” farms. We bought eggs regularly from a neighbor. Peaches were sold by the peck off a pickup truck from a farmer from South Carolina who came by two or three times a year. (He was a preacher and knew my grandpa Harvey Ragan would always buy a peck for each of his children’s families.) My granddaddy Marvin Ball, who lived in town (Varina, also known as Fuquay-Varina), grew cantaloupe and strawberries in his side yard.

We ate a lot of beef since Daddy owned a dairy. I always envied my friends who had pork and chicken regularly. I didn’t appreciate all those steaks, roasts, and ribs until I got older and had to pay for them myself! Sometimes we would have fish caught from Daddy’s pond, but it was messy to clean them (dehead, scale, and remove the “guts”). The beef from Daddy’s cows wasn’t the pretty bright red color of beef in the grocery today, but it tasted much better. He would slaughter a cow and take it to the freezer locker. In downtown Fuquay Springs (also known as Fuquay-Varina), one grocery store called the Food Center, at Main and Academy streets, had a freezer locker in the back. The staff would prepare the meat by cutting it into pieces, wrapping it in special white paper, and stamping the name of the cut (T-bone, hamburger, roast) on the outside front. They put the meat into our family’s locked freezer drawer.

When we went to the grocery store, Momma first went to the freezer locker. She would select the cuts of meat needed for about a month and place them in a box to put in the car. Then we’d go on our other errands and lastly get the rest of the groceries. We’d put the perishables next to or on top of the frozen meat. The meat was so cold that it was as hard as wood—cold enough to keep

everything else cold until we got home, a half-hour trip driving on country roads.

Now, unfortunately, we settle for food that is not as good. It's grown in artificial conditions. The textures are different. The flavor is definitely not as good. We didn't realize our ordinary meals would become special events. Things don't always progress with progress!

**At the time of this article's publication, EvelynRuth Ragan was an employee of the North Carolina Division of Tourism, Film, and Sports Development and a longtime docent at the North Carolina Museum of History, where she was formerly employed. Her family has lived in the Triangle area since the early 1800s.*