

Hearty bowl of history

Keeneland's burgoo represents Kentucky traditions with a dash of mystery

By Sharon Thompson

Burgoo is as much a part of the Keeneland experience as the horses. A steaming bowl of this traditional stew warms the heart as well as the stomach.

Stories about the origins of the hearty soup date back to the 1800s and—depending on who's telling the story—contains everything from squirrel and elk to okra and lima beans. What we do know about burgoo is that it's a soup that was made with whatever was in the smokehouse, kitchen pantry or cellar when it was time to cook up a large pot for the horse show crowd, church parishioners or politicians at a rally. Historically, burgoo was cooked outdoors in iron kettles over an open wood fire.

Early stories tell of people bringing whatever was available to be thrown into the black iron wash pot. Hunters brought wild game; farmers threw in mutton, pork, beef or chicken; and the housewife brought fresh or home-canned corn, tomatoes, lima beans, okra, onions, peppers, carrots and potatoes. No matter what goes



into the kettle, the consensus is that burgoo is thick, but still soupy, and that the great flavor comes from its long, slow cooking time.

Burgoo's mystique has lingered through generations, and each section of Kentucky has its own noted burgoo makers and favorite recipes. Anderson County has an annual burgoo festival, and Owensboro is famous for MoonLite Bar-B-Q's version of burgoo.

Documentary filmmaker Stan Woodward of North Carolina, who recent-

ly made a film about Southern stews and is working on a separate documentary about burgoo, said pinning down burgoo's single origin is hard. That was one thing that prompted the folklorist to study Kentucky's burgoo culture.

"The answers we were really interested in tracking down must come from the voices of the people as practitioners," Woodward said.

Woodward found that the "folks who cook burgoo today think locally in terms of 'I remember my great-grandpa cooked it. That's as far back as I know.'"

Today, most cooks make burgoo by following a recipe and stopping by the supermarket for specific ingredients. If you want to try your hand at making burgoo, here's a recipe from Turf Catering. 🐎

Sharon Thompson is the food writer for the *Lexington Herald-Leader* and author of *Flavors of Kentucky*. You can find her food stories and recipes at www.flavorsofkentucky.com.



Chef Ed

Kentucky Burgoo

from Chef Ed and Turf Catering

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| Oil | 2 16-ounce cans mixed vegetables |
| 3 pounds stew meat, cubed | 1 7-ounce can tomato puree |
| 1 teaspoon ground thyme | 2 pounds fresh okra, sliced |
| 1 teaspoon sage | 1 tablespoon beef base |
| 1 teaspoon oregano | 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce |
| 1 teaspoon minced garlic | 1 cup sherry |
| 1 cup diced celery | 3 pounds potatoes, diced |
| 1 cup diced carrot | Cornstarch |
| 1 cup diced onion | |
| 1 12-ounce can diced tomatoes in juice | |

Heat the oil in a large Dutch oven. Brown the stew meat with the herbs and garlic. Add the remaining ingredients, except cornstarch, and cover with water. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for at least three hours. Adjust seasonings to taste and thicken with cornstarch. Makes 10 to 12 servings.