



A 1940s Holiday Menu of Native American Foods

For the December 1940 meeting of the Cassina Garden Club on St. Simons Island, the organization's president, Miss A. J. Postell, asked Vara Majette to present a lecture on Native American foods of Coastal Georgia. One of the first women attorneys in Georgia, Majette had moved to the island from Jesup in 1932, following the death of her husband. Fascinated by the island's people and past, she became known as an expert in local history.

For the Garden Club talk, Majette carefully researched her topic, writing to "any and every person whom I thought might have ... material on the subject," including the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Library of Congress. She received an abundance of information, and her talk covered both the plants and animals that

made up the Indian diet. Many of the plants she mentioned were familiar: corn, squash, and pumpkin. Others were unusual, such as smilax roots and berries, hearts of the palmetto plant, and fruit from the Spanish bayonet. She also described how live oak acorns were pounded and used as meal after being washed many times to remove bitterness.

Majette reported that the variety of meats available "went down all the line of most creeping or crawling or swimming creatures." These included alligator, rattlesnake, fish, deer, wild turkey, rabbit, and oysters. Among the crawling edibles was the grugru grub, a large worm that lived in the heart of the palmetto plant and could be roasted.

In honor of the season, Majette concluded her lecture with a whimsical version of an "Early

American Christmas Dinner" menu, which showcased midcentury cooking styles using Native American foods. Included were toasted Yucca cakes, grugru grubs with wild crab apples pickled in hickory nut oil, roast wild turkey, crushed black walnuts spread with wild honey, and Yaupon brandy.

Research for the Garden Club talk probably inspired Majette's painting, *Drying Meat, Fish and Other Food*, shown here. She began painting at the age of 75, mainly in watercolor, and became known for scenes based on her extensive study of local history. A collection of Majette's historical paintings was donated to the Coastal Georgia Historical Society by her daughter, Virginia. The picture of Majette shown here and the transcript of her lecture were given to the Society by the Cassina Garden Club.