


 Search bayweekly.com

 Search Google

# BAY WEEKLY

The Best of the Bay - Every Week Since 1993

[Current Issue](#) \\ [This Week's Features](#) \\ [Calendar](#) \\ [Music Calendar](#)  
[Classifieds](#) \\ [Movie Times](#) \\ [Movie Reviews](#) \\ [Play Reviews](#) \\ [Archives](#) \\ [Advertising](#)

Volume 15, Issue 40 ~ October 4 - October 10, 2007

**Think  
Bay Weekly  
Call  
410-626-9888  
for  
more  
details**

## The Cape Anne Pig and Me

*An early autumn lesson in barbeque*

by **Ricky Rood**

I have in my middle age become identified with pork.

It is true that I ate barbeque in three different states on a drive between Durham, North Carolina, and Churchton, Maryland: breakfast in Weldon, lunch in Ashland, Virginia, and dinner at a picnic table on the side of U.S. 301 south of La Plata. Achieving a decent time between meals required some wandering through back roads.



Such rare behavior contributes to this unjustified porcine exaggeration. Yet I suffer its consequences, as I did at the 75th birthday of the Churchton community of Cape Anne, where I had lived for 20 of those 75 years.

### The Cape Anne Pig

Neighbor Tom Kennedy was amongst the group planning the celebration. The previous fall, Tom had dug a hole in his backyard and cooked a pig.

Tom's pig-in-the-hole experiment had been a success. He had dug the hole, lined it with some rocks, burned a large heap of wood in the hole, heating the rocks, placed the pig in the hole and covered it with, I recall, plywood and wet leaves. Perhaps, wet banana leaves. This is the legendary pig cooking technique of Hawaii, and Tom approached the legend with enthusiasm and practicality.

Nevertheless, Tom seemed to have an element of surprise in his glee when he stopped by my house to tell me that he had cooked a pig in a hole in his backyard, and I was more than welcome to come over and eat a few pounds of it. I did, and I agreed that what had emerged from the hole was finely cooked pork. By the standards of barbeque of my experience, very moist; there was a definite element of steam.

As the summer of Cape Anne's 75th birthday rolled around, Tom's pig success was recalled. A Hawaiian pig would sit beside a few bushels of crabs at the celebration.

When I first moved to Cape Anne, I had noticed, while planting my cherry trees, that often the soil was wet. If I dug a hole 12 inches deep, it was not long before a puddle sat in the bottom. There is this gray clay, which changes from brick to glop depending on the rain. I recall having been surprised that Tom's backyard hole had supported pig cooking the previous fall. Perhaps the wet soil had been part of the pig's success.

This summer, however, was very wet. Being one of those scientific sorts, I was concerned about the pig cooking. Tom assured me that the hole could be adequately dried with the hydraulic pump we used in our community pier-building. I accepted his analysis.

The pig was to be eaten on a Saturday. Friday night I was coming home from work on the late side. On Muddy Creek Road, I got behind a large barbequing device being towed slowly. Having some anticipation of the impending Cape Anne pig, I was put in mind of the next day. Every turn that I had to make on the way home was preceded by a like turn of the truck and the grill.

I concluded that the mobile pit was headed to Tom's. He and the crew must have abandoned the idea of pumping out the hole. I imagined it so wet that the operation would be something like the suction required by the dentist to keep your mouth dry; performed, of course, in the presence of hot rocks. I was prepared to follow the truck to Tom's to discuss it all.

When the truck continued onward, I concluded it was to go to the community pavilion. It did not stop there. It pulled in front of my driveway and stopped. Out came a couple of men, one of them Tom.

The hole was indeed flooded, and he had acquired this mobile cooker from some fellow down the road. He hoped that I did not mind, but it had been decided that since I was from North Carolina, I must know how to cook a pig. I was, on that Friday night, left with a cooker, a 130-pound pig, and a heap of charcoal that Tom had heard was the right amount for a 130-pound pig.

I had cooked a decent pork roast now and then, one as large as eight pounds. I also had gone to some effort to create a sauce that, when combined with my decent pork roast, was a good enough imitation of North Carolina barbeque, eastern North Carolina, that people were placed in the memory of better barbeque experiences.

I had never cooked a 130-pound pig. There was no negotiation, however, and I was left with the pig and many accolades of my assumed ability to make it into barbeque.

### How to Cook a Pig

I most wanted to know how long to cook the pig. I thought I might have to start that instant and stay up all night.

In the little house in Cape Anne there were many, many cookbooks. Most of them had titles that included either the word vegetarian or 30 minutes. There were some old classics, but nothing about a pig, unless it was an essay about some memorable night in Italy or Polynesia, followed by how to recreate it all in a crock pot.

I looked next on the web. In my search, I took solace in one of my lessons of life. There are in the world thousands, if not millions, of cookbooks. Many of these books lay out exactly how, for example, a pork shoulder must be cooked. They maintain that if the pork shoulder is not treated by their prescription, many embarrassing and distasteful consequences will be realized. Many of these books directly conflict with others, and most produce a good pork shoulder. The lesson: people have been around a long time and getting things cooked by whatever means they have in front of them. It works out.

### Adoration of the Meat

I got up early and started burning a mountain of charcoal in a steel fire pit. The cooker was going to require stoking with hot coals at regular intervals. Ideally, I was supposed to keep the cooker at 275 degrees; this is an ideal that I neither agreed with nor thought possible.

In an hour, I had fire, and with some help I hoisted the pig onto the grill, skin side up. We closed the top. I was committed, which required great discipline, to leave the top closed and not peek. I kept adding new charcoal in the drawer on the end of the pit. After four hours Tom and I put on gloves; he grabbed the legs, I grabbed the arms, and we turned the creature over.

At this moment, my apprehension about cooking a 130-pound pink creature disappeared. Browning meat on a fire is primitive and elemental. From some lobes and/or some cortex in the brain rush chemicals of emotion. Goofy, big-mouthed smiles are made. A hundred thousand years ago, maybe, seeing the animal on the fire meant that you would survive another two weeks. Today, in a fatted land on the edge of the Chesapeake Bay, these brain chemicals turn into pleasures, decadences and acceptable naughtiness. There is satisfaction knowing that you are capable of basic, essential simplicity: animal on a fire.

I poured sauce into the browning flesh. I put more fire into the drawer and closed the top. Having seen the crisping pig, I found it even more difficult to keep the top closed. A gathering crowd also wanted to see under the black lid of the cooker. We all wanted to look and feel that which is ancient: the primitive adoration of meat.

Young girls would see the meat, gasp, find some friends and watch.

Young boys would point at crisp pieces they wanted. They would conjecture about other animals available for cooking. They picked up small dogs.

Women would talk about the meat turning pink, a sign of slow cooking they had seen at some remote BBQ restaurant in the South.

Men offered to marry me. They told me of the restrictions levied by their wives. They remembered distant times in distant lands with rich feasts of celebrations. They spoke of moments of valor and accomplishment in gluttony.

I satisfied them all with a plate of trimmings I chopped and mixed with my own Cape Anne Sauce. There were forks full of fatty, crispy meat that I reserved for those closest to ecstasy.

Others approached with trepidation, trying to use the crowd to hide their approach. Some were vegetarians, seeking confidences from me.

A bold one finally asked for the meat from the cheeks.

### How Good Was that Pig?



*The author and pig-cooker, right, with Steve Goins, center, and Tom Kennedy.*

#### Cape Anne BBQ Sauce

This quick sauce can be used as made, mixed into the meat as it is chopped or for dipping at the table. It lasts in a jar for a few months but does not age well. North Carolina style sauces generally have no sugar, and Eastern North Carolina sauces have nothing red or brown in them. They are vinegar sauces, to be mixed into the meat as it is chopped.

- 1 quart apple cider vinegar
- 1 can (14 ounces) crushed tomatoes
- 3 Tbs. dried minced onion
- 2 Tbs. peppercorns, coarsely crushed
- 1 Tbs. crushed, dried cayenne
- 1 Tbs. garlic powder
- 1 Tbs. salt
- 5 bay leaves

Combine ingredients. Bring to boil for about 5 minutes.

The pig, the sauce, it all worked. The next morning, three little boys, names unknown, walked up to me in my yard and held out five dollars. They said they had collected it, and they offered it to me for another pig.

This success further exaggerated my affiliation with pork. It is true that I have a rating system for barbeque restaurants. There are five categories.

Five, the best, is a destination. At least when I was less concerned about my carbon dioxide emissions, this meant you went out of your way, up to two hours, to go to the restaurant.

Four means that if you are in town, you make sure you go there.

Three means that if you live in town with the place, you go there regularly, and you take visitors.

Two means that you try someplace else, hoping for better.

One means you don't go there even for a free meal if offered.

I give my pig, at least when fresh, a four.

Afterward

In 2004 I went on sabbatical to Livermore, California. While I was there Tom Kennedy died. Tom was part of the energy of Cape Anne. He had an old truck, cigars, a smile and was willing to dig a hole to cook a pig. Thank you, Tom.

p

*North Carolina native Ricky Rood teaches at the University of Michigan. He lived on the Bay for more than 20 years and still returns. He writes a climate-change blog for Weather Underground. (<http://www.wunderground.com/blog/RickyRood/show.html>). Reach him at [bayrood@erols.com](mailto:bayrood@erols.com).*