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The Dish

New cookbooks worth a look

It must be time to cook. Three (count 'em, three) cookbooks of local interest are hitting bookstore shelves. All are about foods that Southerners hold dear.

Remembering Bill Neal: Favorite Recipes from a Life in Cooking, by the chef's former wife Moreton Neal, takes a closer look at the well-known chef's life and art. Before he died, Mr. Neal helped elevate the status of Southern cooking with his cookbooks and Chapel Hill restaurants La Residence and Crook's Corner.

Long-time locals may remember that this area had it's own Neal franchise in the former downtown restaurant Crook's by the River.

The book won't be released until mid-October (\$22.95, The University of North Carolina Press). (For one of Mr. Neal's most famous recipes to help you make it until then, see 4D.)

Aunt Mag's Recipe Book: Heritage Cooking from a Carolina Kitchen, by Carolyn Rawls Booth (Between the Rivers) takes a more traditional approach to Southern cooking and focuses on the traditions of those who settled in coastal North Carolina.

The spiral-bound book retails for \$12 and is from the Wilmington-based Winoca Press.

Get a taste of the Country Ham & Red-eye Gravy Aunt Mag's is serving up.

Country Ham & Red-eye Gravy

1 tablespoon butter
8 thin slices of country ham
1/2 to 1 cup black coffee

Melt the butter over medium-high heat in a skillet large enough to accommodate the ham slices. When the butter begins to brown, add the ham and cook quickly on both sides until lightly browned. Remove ham to a platter.

For the gravy, pour enough hot coffee in the pan to just cover the bottom. Stir with a wooden spoon to loosen any bits of ham. Boil about 1 minute. Pour gravy into a small dish and watch the red-eye form.

Recipe from Aunt Mag's Recipe Book: Heritage Cooking from a Carolina Kitchen