

Jefferson-era Recipe: Tomato Catsup

by Anonymous - September 2, 2011

Time for the September installment of our monthly series in which we post a recipe from The Virginia House-wife, a recipe book published in 1824 by Mary Randolph, kinswoman to Thomas Jefferson. Leni Sorensen, our African American Research Historian and a culinary historian of national repute, has once again made this month's dish and here we include her notes and pictures.

Mary Randolph, *The Virginia House-Wife*, 1824; facsimile of first edition, Historical notes and commentaries by Karen Hess, University of South Carolina Press, 1984, p. 201.

Tomato Catsup

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The original recipe from Mary Randolph:

Gather a peck of tomatas, pick out the stems , and wash them; put them on the fire without water, sprinkle on a few spoonsful of salt, let them boil steadily an hour, stirring them frequently, strain them through a colander, and then through a sieve; put the liquid on the fire with half a pint of chopped onions, a quarter of an ounce of mace broke into small pieces, and if not sufficiently salt, add a little more, one tablespoonful of whole black pepper, boil all together until just enough to fill two bottles; cork it tight. —make it in August.

Leni's notes:

A peck is one-quarter of a bushel and weighs in at 13.25 pounds but feel free to multiply this recipe.



Blend and strain. I love my immersion blender and it made the straining job easier.





Add the onion and the mace and pepper to the strained sauce and continue cooking down.





Randolph calls for no additional water so be sure to watch the heat and stir the sauce often.



Mary Randolph's enslaved cooks were preparing the catsup over coals on a hearth. The process probably took all day to reduce down. It took three hours at a low simmer on my gas stove. Your finished catsup can be preserved in pint jars and sealed with in a boiling water bath.



Most particularly notice that this recipe calls for no sugar (!) and thus would have had a rich concentrated tomato taste which was used to accent other sauces and gravy's and not as a condiment as we do today. Randolph recommends her catsup be made in August but we usually have tomatoes still coming out of our ears well into September what with today's farmer's markets and prolific gardens.

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