

Blue Ridge Folklife

Thirty Years of Fried Pies and Other Delights

Roddy Moore and Vaughan Webb



Traditions change with lifestyles and technology: these Roanoke, Virginia, “gandy dancers” now work primarily with large machinery. Photo courtesy Blue Ridge Institute

By the mid-1700s, the settlement of western Virginia was at full speed. The English and their African American slaves built large farms in the Virginia Piedmont. Germans settled much of the Shenandoah Valley, and the Scots-Irish carved out smaller farmsteads in the hollows of the Blue Ridge Mountains. People, commerce, and information flowed through western Virginia along the Great Wagon Road, the Carolina Road, and the Wilderness Road. By 1860, the railroad was crisscrossing Virginia. By 1900, the coal, timber, and farm products of western Virginia were sold throughout the eastern United States. Still, many Virginians held fast to their old cultural identities and to the music, speech, foodways, crafts, and social customs that reflected their identities.

In the early 1970s, Ferrum College created the Blue Ridge Institute & Museum to document and showcase the folklife of the Blue Ridge. The Institute’s work is part of a regional collecting tradition that stretches back over a century. The field-workers of the early 1900s, however, could scarcely have imagined how folkways would change and how easy it would become to record and present so many traditions to a huge audience.

Although the Blue Ridge Institute & Museum focuses on western Virginia, it follows traditions statewide—from cane carving and apple growing to hot-rod building and quartet singing. The Institute’s programs include museum exhibitions, online resources, a living history museum, and media productions. In 1986, it was designated the State Center for Blue Ridge Folklore. Each fall, on the fourth Saturday of October, the Blue Ridge Institute & Museum transforms the campus of Ferrum College into Virginia’s largest celebration of regional folkways. Presenting old-time crafts, music, food, car culture, working-animal competitions, and much more.

Roddy Moore has been Director of Ferrum College’s Blue Ridge Institute & Museum for over thirty years.

Vaughan Webb, Assistant Director of Ferrum College’s Blue Ridge Institute & Museum, has been a folklorist at the Institute since 1981.

FRIED APPLE PIES

Fried apple pie is a real treat at the Blue Ridge Folklife Festival. The following recipe was demonstrated at the 1995 festival. Mrs. Virginia P. Crook of Ferrum, Virginia, learned the recipe from her mother, who, before she passed away in 1974 at the age of 87, had made enough of these pies to lay end to end around the world several times. The secret is in the dried apples.

Filling

2 cups (packed) dried apples (Good drying apples are winesap, Granny Smith, or Summer Rambo)
3 cups water
¼ teaspoon cinnamon
¼ teaspoon cloves
Cook until tender and waterless.
Sweeten to taste, and set aside to cool.

Crust

2 cups plain white flour
1 tablespoon sugar
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ cup solid shortening (preferably Crisco)
Enough ice water to make up a good workable dough

Directions

Divide dough into balls big enough to roll into a piecrust the size of a dessert plate. (My mother said each ball should be “the size of a goose egg.”) Place two to three tablespoons cooled apples in one half of the crust, fold over the other half, and crimp the edges to seal the crust. It should look similar to a crescent. Heat oil or solid shortening in an iron frying pan, about two inches deep. Fry the pies until golden brown on both sides. Drain on paper towels or clean cloth. These can be frozen. The recipe should make about six pies.

Additional Notes

To test the temperature of the oil, drop a drop of cold water in the pan. If it dances all the way across the pan, it is hot enough.