Treats from a Dutch Oven

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by Lydia Lovell

While entirely possible today to buy a single pan or pot or spider (with or without a cover), most people equip the first kitchen they call their own with a matched set of pots and pans, and keep that set for years. When I was a bride, copper-bottomed stainless-steel ware with plastic handles was considered best. Now, 40-odd years and fourteen household moves later, I'm still using that set even though, in one of those moves, the lid to the smallest saucepan was lost forever.

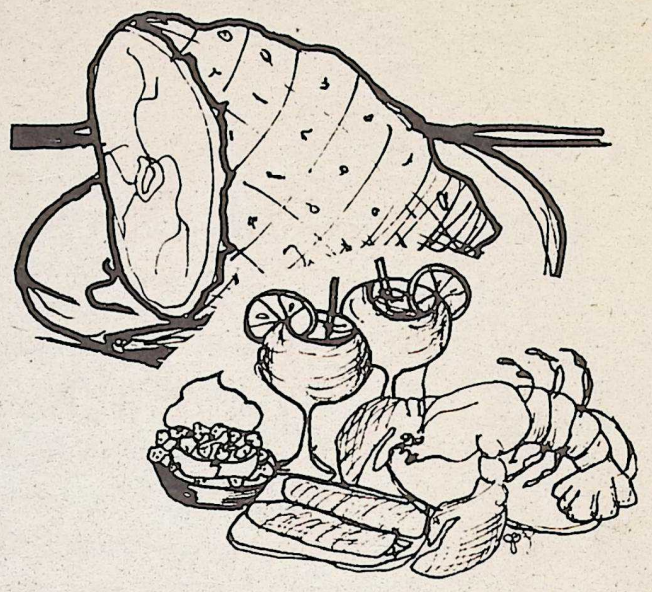
When Aunt Olivia and Uncle Henry set up housekeeping, pots and pans were yet to be marketed in sets. Their equipage began with whatever their mothers could spare, augmented with purchases made from the tinker who came through the village semi-annually, his horse-drawn wagon a-jingle with metal containers and implements of every description. He carried ironware and tinware and, in later years, enamelware. He dealt in dippers, strainers, long-handled forks and spoons, grids for toasting, ladles and flipper-turners, as well as kettles and spiders, cookie sheets and gem pans, saucepans and covers. And he brought knives and scissors and razors and blades, as well. Over years, every household acquired its inventory of cooking utensils and while sets we buy today seem adequate for most simple cooking, half Aunt Olivia's pantry shelves were taken up with pots and pans.

A modern set of pots always includes what is called a Dutch oven, a large kettle wtih closely-fitting cover, a pot suitable for boiling spaghetti, making soup, or stewing a chicken. The Dutch oven, though, is probably the least-used pot of the set; at least, it is, of my copper-bottoms. Maybe one reason is that I've given too little thought to ways it can serve exactly as the small appliance that sits on its own electric base rather than a stove-top burner and that we call a slow-cooker. The kettle Aunt Olivia used for stewing chicken and making soup or pot roast was essentially identical to my copper-bottomed stainless-steel Dutch oven, the principal difference being that hers was made of cast iron. She used her iron kettle often. For instance, **Smoked Ham Butt with Pineapple sauce,** prepared in a Dutch oven, will serve six.

3-lb. smoked ham butt
1-1/2 C. water
3/4 C. pineapple juice
6 T. brown sugar
1-1/2 t. dry mustard

Using a Dutch oven, tightly covered, cook ham in water 2-1/2 hours on large top burner of stove over low heat. Drain; discard cooking water. Combine remaining ingredients and pour over ham in Dutch oven. Place Dutch oven, uncovered, in 325° oven, and bake ham for 35 to 40 minutes longer. Thicken sauce wtih cornstarch, if desired, and serve with meat. Good with boiled potatoes, green peas, and cole slaw.

One of Uncle Henry's favorite dinners was **Short Ribs of Beef With Wine Sauce.** Aunt Olivia usually prepared it a day ahead of time when she knew she would be busy the following afternoon. This dinner, one she could "take up in a hurry," was ample for six people.



4 lbs. short ribs
2 large onions, fine-chopped
1 C. medium-dry red wine
2/3 C. ketchup
3 T. soy sauce
2 T. brown sugar
1/2 t. fresh-ground pepper

Have your butcher cut the ribs into pieces 2" to 3" long. Place ribs in Dutch oven. Sprinkle with onions. Stir together wine, ketchup, soy sauce, brown sugar, and pepper. Pour mixture over ribs, cover tightly, and simmer two hours on top of stove. Check at 30-minute intervals, adding more wine if needed to keep meat moist. After two hours, stir ribs to turn them over, add more wine if needed, cover again, and continue cooking another hour or until meat is very tender. Lift meat from juice to a casserole with cover. Refrigerate. Allow juices to cool slightly; then refrigerate so fat will harden on top. Skim off all fat; then measure juice.

To make gravy, thicken with one T. flour stirred into one quarter-cup of cool water until smooth for each cup of juice. Reheat juice. Before it comes to a boil, stir in flour-and-water mixture, continuing to stir until gravy thickens. Return meat to gravy and simmer a few minutes until hot. Serve short ribs with mashed potatoes, Italian green beans, and carrot coins.

Of all good things Aunt Olivia turned out of her cast-iron kettle and put before us at suppertime, one among my special favorites was **Spareribs And Sauerkraut.** This recipe may make enough for six in your family, but any four Lovells could polish off every smidgeon, so you know I wasn't the only one who liked it.

3 lbs. spareribs [fresh; not smoked]
1 T. cooking oil
1 t. salt
dash of pepper
1 qt. sauerkraut
2 T. brown sugar
1 C. water
6 to 8 medium potatoes

Heat oil in Dutch oven over medium-high heat on top burner. Add ribs and brown well. Season with salt and pepper. Remove ribs to a platter. Pour off fat, but do not wash kettle, add sauerkraut to kettle and sprinkle with brown sugar. Arrange ribs on top of sauerkraut to kettle and sprinkle with brown sugar. Arrange ribs on top of sauerkraut. Add water, cover, and cook over low heat for 45 minutes or until rib meat is almost tender. Peel and quarter potatoes and add to pot (on top of ribs). Cook another 30 to 45 minutes until potatoes are tender. To make this dish even heartier and more flavorful and to thicken the sauce, grate two extra potatoes and mix with kraut at the same time you put in the quartered potatoes. Green peas and a fruit salad make pleasant go-togethers.

There can be no better pot or kettle for making a rich and hearty soup than a Dutch oven. If I never used mine for any other purose, I should want one within arm's reach for making soup. You may think mid-summer an unusual time of year to suggest turkey soup, but not in the Lovell family. As Aunt Olivia discovered, many many moons ago, one of the easiest meals to serve a crowd is roast turkey, and a crowd is quite likely to gather in the summertime. Taking a page from Aunt Olivia's book, I like to keep frozen turkey on hand for summer treats and easy entertaining. A more versatile meat, every ready to slice or cube or cream for sandwich, salads, soup, or patty-shells, is difficult to image. The time comes, inevitably, when there is just a little bit left. . .too little to feed four or six, but still too much to put down for the cat. That's when we prepare **Hearty Turkey Soup.**

3 C. turkey [or chicken] broth
1 C. [more or less] cooked turkey
1 pkg. frozen frenched string beans
1/4 C. butter
2 T. chopped onion
½ C. diagonally-sliced celery
1 t. curry powder
1 C. potatoes, cubed
1/2 C. diagonally-sliced carrots
salt and pepper to taste
1/2 t. oregano
2 T. minced parsley [fresh]
1 14-oz. can evaporated milk
2 T. flour

Melt butter in bottom of Dutch oven on top of stove. Saute onion and celery in butter until onion is transparent but now brown. Stir in curry powder and cook a few minutes longer. Add cubed potatoes, carrot slices, turkey broth, salt and pepper. Bring to a boil, then turn heat to low; simmer for 15 minutes. Stir in turkey meat, french-style green beans, oregano, and parsley; simmer ten minutes more. Mix milk and flour, and stir gently into soup. Simmer until slightly thickened. Serve to six hungry lunchers.

This soup, like most, is excellent when freshly made. . .and even better after being refrigerated overnight and reheated the next day. There is nothing wrong with saving this recipe to use next November when your Thanksgiving turkey has reached the "last gasp" stage. It's super then, too.

Bon appetit.