

SUSAN RAY BROWN - ARTIST PROFILE SUBMISSION

1. Documentation of My Work

1. Photo # 1 My grandmother's handwritten salt rising bread recipe

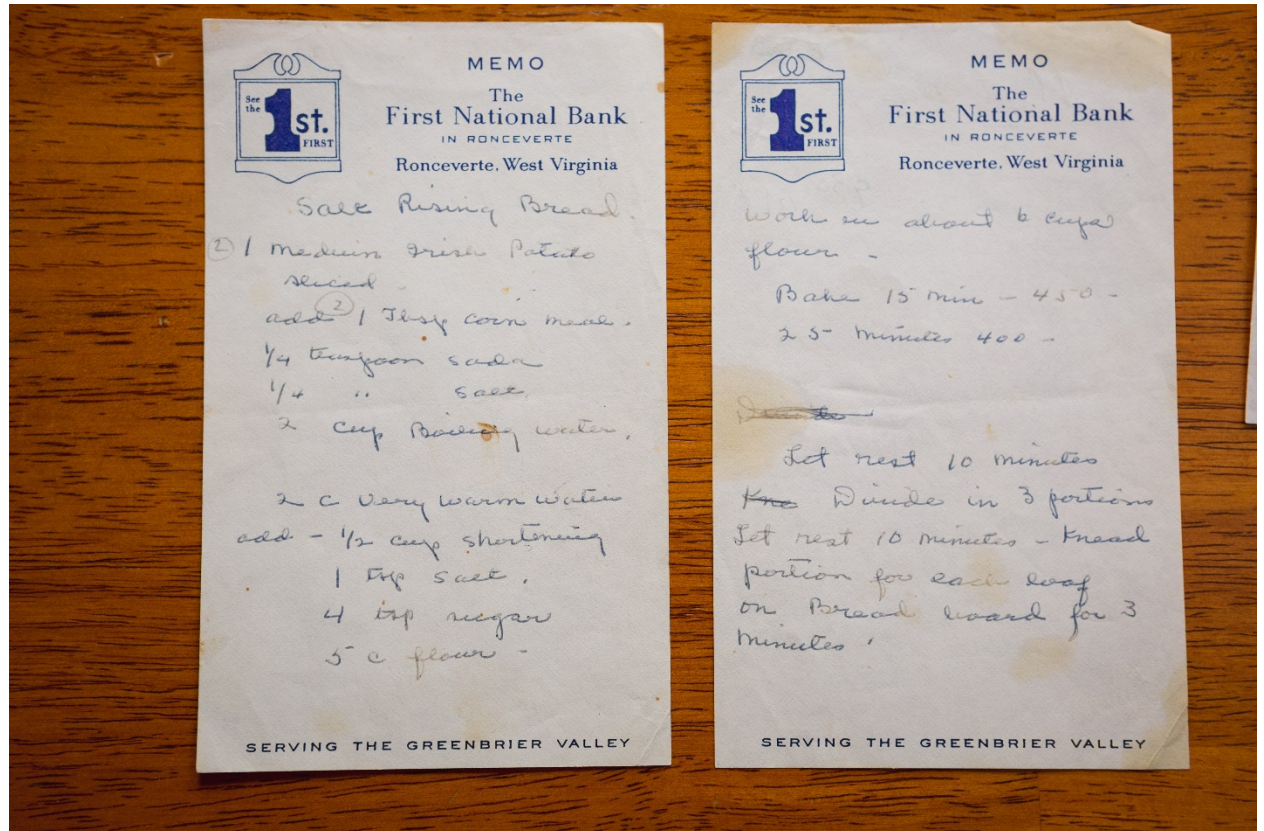


Photo # 2 Pearl Haines' 150+ year old wooden handmade salt rising bread bowl with a loaf of salt rising bread



Photo # 3 Salt rising toast



2. Biographical Information

My family roots on both my mother and my father's side go back nearly 300 years to the beloved hills of West Virginia. My father was raised in Summersville, in Nicholas County, and my mother was raised in Ronceverte, in Greenbrier County. I was born on October 3, 1953 in Winchester, Virginia, which, at that time, was the nearest hospital to where my family lived in Fort Ashby, West Virginia. When I was 3 years old, my parents and my two siblings and I moved a few miles over the Mineral County line to Romney, in Hampshire County. My father, Dr. Bob Brown, and his brother, Dr. Dudley Brown, were both well-known and well-respected "country doctors" in Hampshire County for many, many years. I currently live on the West Virginia/Pennsylvania state line outside of Mt. Morris, PA.

The art form, which I share as Master artist with Genevieve Bardwell, is in the foodways category. It is a beloved bread known throughout West Virginia called salt rising bread. This bread dates back to the 1700s and is a uniquely Appalachian tradition, having first been made in these mountains. The bread is a white, dense bread that is made with a starter born of a unique bacterial fermentation. It has a cheese-like flavor and is mostly eaten as toast. There are 3 stages involved in making this bread: the starter, the sponge, and the dough. Altogether, it typically takes about 16 hours to make, from start to finish. Salt rising bread has its own unique aroma, some likening it to stinky gym shoes or dirty baby diapers. But, to the many people who love this bread, it is unbeatable.

Accomplishments that I have made related to salt rising bread include:

- *G. Bardwell and S.R. Brown. Mon County Extension Service: Salt Rising Bread article for Extension Service publication; survey for srb recipe collection, 2000
- *Juckett, G., G. Bardwell, B. McClane, S.R. Brown. The Microbiology of Salt Rising Bread. WV Medical Journal. Vol. 104. Pp 26-27. 2008
- *G. Bardwell and S.R. Brown. West Virginia University, Davis College of Agriculture, seminar about salt rising bread. 2014
- *Brown. Appalachian Studies Association Conference, Huntington, WV, seminar about salt rising bread. March, 2014; Brown and Bardwell, ASA Conference 2016 in Blacksburg, VA
- *WV Public Radio program “WV Morning” 2014 and “Inside Appalachia” 2017; National Public Radio Food Blog – “Bake Bread Like a Pioneer” 2014
- *“Pitt Med Magazine,” University of Pittsburgh Medical School journal, salt rising bread article. 2014
- * Brown, S. R., G. Bardwell. Salt Rising Bread. Pg. 154-162 in *Handbook of Indigenous Foods Involving Alkaline Fermentation* (Eds. Sarkar, P.K. and Nout, M.J.R.) Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group. 2015
- *Atlas Obscura: <http://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/the-beloved-pioneer-bread-that-smells-like-feet-and-breaks-food-safety-rules> November 2015
- *Bardwell, G. and S. R. Brown. *Salt Rising Bread: Recipes and Heartfelt Stories of a Nearly Lost Appalachian Tradition*. St. Lynn’s Press, Pittsburgh, PA. June 2016
- *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette: Pittsburgh Post-Gazette: <http://www.post-gazette.com/life/food/2016/07/06/Keeping-Appalachia-bread-tradition-alive-is-well-worth-its-salt/stories/201607060010> July 2016
- * Chicago Tribune: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/dining/recipes/sc-salt-rising-bread-food-0930-20160928-story.html> September 2016
- *Smokey Mountain Living magazine: <http://www.smliv.com/departments/sweetappalachia/salt-rising-bread/> December, 2016

3. Artist Statement

One very special person is the reason that I sit here today writing about salt rising bread. That person is my grandmother, Katheryn Rippetoe Erwin. She made salt rising bread all of her life, as did her mother and her mother's mother. I loved my grandmother, and I loved her salt rising bread. It is to Grandmother that I owe my appreciation for this bread, and to her that I attribute my commitment to carry on this family tradition in any way that I can. Whether it was for church bazaars, PTA bake sales, funeral dinners, ailing neighbors, or just "baking day," Katheryn Erwin's salt rising bread was famous in her hometown of Ronceverte, West Virginia. The memories of those early morning awakenings to check to see if her starter had come, and her wonderful breakfasts of fried bacon, eggs-over-easy, and salt rising toast eaten at her kitchen table, stay with me and propel me year after year to keep the salt rising bread tradition alive.

We often say that salt rising bread is food for the body as well as for the soul. In fact, almost everyone who has eaten salt rising bread has a story to tell about it. These stories loom large in the hearts of those who love the bread. They are, indeed, another reason why the salt rising bread tradition lives on in our Appalachian homes and why it is so important and so special to preserve this bread and the stories that help keep this tradition alive.

Although my grandmother is no longer with us, I never butter a slice of salt rising toast without feeling her right there by my side.