

1. Documentation of your work

1. Artist name: Amy Dawson, Apprentice

Title of work(s): Salt Rising Bread

Media format: photograph

Additional information: Salt Rising Bread made April 23, 2018, at Lost Creek Farm by apprentice, Amy Dawson. Photo by Mike Costello.

2. Artist name: Amy Dawson, Apprentice

Title of work(s): Salt Rising Bread

Media format: photograph

Additional information: Tomatoes on tomatoes on tomatoes: a dish served by Lost Creek Farm at dinner in Alderson, WV, May 31, 2018, featuring Salt Rising Bread made by my apprentice, Amy Dawson. Photo by Mike Costello.

3. Artist name: Amy Dawson, Apprentice

Title of work(s): Salt Rising Bread

Media format: photograph

Additional information: Salt Rising Bread made June 3, 2018, at Lost Creek Farm by apprentice, Amy Dawson. Photo by Mike Costello.

2. Biographical information

Date and place of birth: September 24, 1984; Lost Creek, WV

Current place of residence: Lost Creek, WV

Brief (350 words or less) description of the art form/tradition. Salt rising bread is a staple heritage bread in many communities throughout West Virginia and the greater Appalachian region. It was borne out of necessity in the Appalachian Mountains by innovative, determined pioneer women, who through trial and error learned to use potash and wild bacterial fermentation to leaven bread. The resulting bread is a force unto itself. It is dense and flat-topped. Unique and pungent in both scent and taste, salt rising bread takes a hard hold onto a person's memory and doesn't let go.

Making salt rising bread requires consistent, warm conditions and patience. Each batch of bread requires starting at the beginning of the process with a new starter every time. Generally, there are two different kinds of starters: a milk and cornmeal starter or a potato starter. After setting the starter and keeping it in a consistent temperature window, it should be ready to make into a sponge - which is the next stage of the process - in about 8-12 hours. Once the starter is ready, flour and water are added to the starter liquid to create a thin batter consistency. This batter is also called the sponge. The sponge is set in a warm place again to continue the fermentation. In about another hour or so, the sponge should double in size and is then ready for the final stage, the dough stage. To the sponge, water, flour, and salt are added and mixed to create a thick, wet dough to be kneaded and shaped into loaves. Once the loaves rise to the top of the pan, the bread can be baked and enjoyed.

Salt rising bread has a flavor and smell all its own. The best way to describe the taste would be "cheesy", but I think that still doesn't quite do it justice.

Accomplishments or personal milestones:

1. 2006: BS in Geology, minor Geography, West Virginia University

2. 2010: JD from College of Law at West Virginia University
3. 2016: Started Lost Creek Farm business with travelling kitchen/pop-up dinner events.
4. January 2018: Began WV Humanities Council Apprenticeship to learn to make salt rising bread.
5. January 2018: Made first successful batch of salt rising bread.
6. March 2018: Lost Creek Farm featured on Anthony Bourdain's "Parts Unknown" television series on CNN.
7. April 2018: With Genevieve Bardwell, presented salt rising bread talk at Appalachian Studies Conference in Cincinnati, OH.
8. April 2018: Presented two informational talks about salt rising bread with Susan Brown and Genevieve Bardwell in Harrison and Pocahontas counties.
9. May 2018: Presented informational talk with Genevieve Bardwell about salt rising bread in Braxton County.
10. May 2018: Made salt rising bread for Lost Creek Farm dinner event in Alderson, WV.
11. June 2018: Lost Creek Farm has hosted over 30 dinner events featuring Appalachian recipes, food traditions, and historical storytelling about local and regional foodways.

3. Artist statement

I loved growing up in West Virginia. I was raised on a farm and feel very fortunate to have had that opportunity. A farm is a great place to be a kid. Unfortunately, I had to grow up and become a teenager, dissatisfied by everything. It was then that I decided that I wanted to get away and find something better. As luck would have it, I didn't. Instead, I came to realize that what I had left behind was really something special, even if the rest of the world couldn't see it. The food and culture that I grew up with are important to me, and I hope to learn all that I can to continue the traditions of this area. I have inherited many treasured recipes from my family, friends, and neighbors. I grew up eating salt rising bread, but had no one close to me from which I could learn that tradition. I am so glad to be learning how to make this bread.

4. Contact information

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Lost Creek Farm on Facebook