Bottling Hell: Myth-Making, Cultural Identity And The Datil Pepper Of St. Augustine, Florida

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BOTTLING HELL: MYTH-MAKING, CULTURAL IDENTITY AND THE DATIL PEPPER
OF ST. AUGUSTINE, FLORIDA

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Southern Studies
The University of Mississippi

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis interrogates the Datil pepper (*Capsicum chinense*) as a potent cultural symbol against a backdrop of heritage tourism in St. Augustine, Florida, widely known as “The Nation’s Oldest City.” The Datil is a locally popular and regionally unique heirloom pepper endemic to St. Augustine and the surrounding environs. A romantic origin story and local lore are embedded on this spicy pepper, tying it to north Florida’s Minorcan population, a group descended from indentured workers brought to the area in the late 1700s. The prominence of this mythology speaks to heritage tourism’s demand for consumable cultural emblems, and the Datil pepper becomes a through line to the inner-workings of this market. This paper challenges notions of heritage in cultural tourism, highlighting the role that tourism proponents play in shaping representations of history.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to David Nolan, forever a champion of the people.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express my deepest appreciation to my advisor, Dr. Andrew Harper, for his unflagging support, encouragement and fascination with Florida. Likewise, I am grateful to my committee, Dr. Charles Reagan Wilson and Dr. Simone Delerme.

Thanks are also in order to my partner, Daniel Ward, for his inexhaustible patience, and to my family for their steady confidence.

This project would not be possible without the the kind people at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture and the Southern Foodways Alliance.
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Intersection of Datil Pepper Road and US-1. St. Augustine, FL. Photo by the author.

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INTRODUCTION

The Datil pepper (*Capsicum chinense*) is a locally beloved and regionally unique heirloom pepper endemic to St. Augustine, Florida. The small, spicy Christmas-light shaped pepper ripens to a bright orange, and while highly regarded in the St. Augustine community, the Datil maintains relative culinary anonymity on a national level. St. Augustine cuisine is often characterized by Datil-based dishes such as pilaus, chowders, sausages and a variety of condiments. The pepper is included in Slow Food’s Ark of Taste catalogue of threatened heirloom and heritage foods.

For hundreds of years, the Datil has become interconnected with St. Augustine’s Minorcan population, a multicultural group descended from indentured workers brought to Florida in the late 1700s. From the time of their arrival in St. Augustine until Florida’s induction into the United States, the Minorcans sustained the city as its backbone population, noted as “the largest stable body of people in that city.”¹ The pepper’s origin story holds that the Minorcans brought the seeds of the Datil pepper from Minorca with them to Florida in the 1700s, and they have continued as the pepper’s stewards ever since.

Despite rising evidence against the Datil as an Old World Minorcan crop, the pepper is vigorously claimed by members of St. Augustine’s Minorcan community, whose recipes have

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long incorporated and featured the pepper. Carol Lopez Bradshaw, Minorcan descendent and St. Augustine resident says as much:

Well if you ask a Minorcan around here they’re going to tell you a Datil pepper is ours. And you have historians that like to think it came from China and it came from Chile and it came from all these places. Well who knows where it originally came from...but the Minorcans—the Datil pepper is well known as related to—associated with the Minorcans.¹

Today, Datils are used both traditionally and nontraditionally, the culinary use extending beyond familial recipes for pilau and clam chowder to foodstuffs such as popsicles and cakes.

Indeed, Mary Ellen Masters, an Elkton, Florida resident and Minorcan descendent famous for her Minorcan clam chowder, catalogues her datil use:

[We use them in] grits, we make Datil pepper grits, and then every time we make a pilau, you know what a pilau is, I have to use some in that. Or clam chowder, I use a lot of Datil peppers in clam chowder. And of course our old used-to-be stand by was gopher stew, which we can't do anymore, but we used to put a lot in that. I put them in cornbread, when I make twelve grain bread. I used them in cheesecake and key lime pie, you name it, basically.²

For Marcia McQuaig, a St. Augustine businesswoman, the appeal of the Datil pepper lies in its romantic history as well as its unique taste:

It's the flavor. It's just got a unique taste...I don't think it's just hot...it's a sweetness, tropical. Anything you put in your recipes, try it! Just add a pepper, or try some of the sauces and it's just...it just kicks it up to another level...you can just taste what the Datil is though. Because it just kind of works its way through everything.³

The Datil’s popularity as a St. Augustine cultural emblem speaks to the robust marketing of the local lore surrounding the pepper: that it arrived with the Minorcans in the 1700s, and that

¹ Carol Lopez Bradshaw, interview with the author, 17 July 2013.
² Mary Ellen Masters, interview with the author, 3 November 2012. Mary Ellen and Lawrence Masters bring raw Datils with them when they eat out to supplement the fare.
³ Marcia McQuaig, interview with the author, 23 July 2013.
it is an exclusively St. Augustine product. Indeed, one St. Augustine businessman told the St. Augustine Record in 1931 that, “according to the best available information from Florida and federal agricultural agencies, the Datil pepper is limited almost exclusively to an area adjacent to St. Augustine itself for its most advantageous production. Although the pepper will grow and has been grown in many other localities, it attains its highest perfection hereabouts.”

Promotion of the Datil as a regional specialty speaks to the process of symbolism at work in the Oldest City’s heritage tourism. This market presents a valuable opportunity for St. Augustine’s Minorcan community, as well as the St. Augustine community as a whole, to distill and (re)present cultural heritage. In the public domain this heritage is intentionally constructed and performed, holding at its center a proud origin story tied to perseverance, fortitude and triumph.

This project analyzes the Datil pepper as a multivocal ethnic symbol in a heritage tourism context, and is fueled by questions of cultural representation: How do the Minorcans, as a

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particular subculture, work to deliberately preserve their heritage and simultaneously situate
themselves in the culture of St. Augustine, Florida? Moreover, how does this play out in the
sphere of heritage tourism, and what are the implications? How is the Datil pepper depicted,
interpreted, consumed and invoked as a cultural messenger?

In conjunction with this written component, this thesis project includes ten audio-
recorded oral history interviews conducted between the fall of 2012 and the summer of 2013.
These range in length from twenty-five minutes to over two hours. Interviewees included Datil
pepper growers, chefs, home cooks, and Minorcan descendants all across St. Johns County,
Florida. I made contacts with community members based on my preexisting relationships, in
addition to recommendations made by locals. While Datil peppers thematically guided these
interviews, each conversation was free-form and moved organically in response to my questions
as well as the subjects’ desires.

My paper rests on a body of scholarship that challenges preconceived notions of heritage
in cultural tourism, insisting that heritage encountered at tourist sites is, in part, a construct
shaped by managerial stakeholders. This isn’t to suggest that the value of cultural signifiers and
group identity are somehow demoted because of their volatility; rather, this acknowledges
fluidity and the multidimensionality of cultural identity, in addition to the innumerable influential
forces acting on it.

Scholars of heritage tourism have long been interested in the interplay of tourists’ sought-
out experiences, producers’ remunerative benefit, the commodification of cultural identity and
the impact on local life. Heritage tourism is enforced as a notion of “economic activity that makes use of socio-cultural assets to attract visitors” governed by the two factors of supply and
demand. Chhabra notes that demand is rooted in visitors’ expectations for a site: it “is representative of many contemporary visitors’ desire...to directly experience and consume diverse past and present cultural landscapes, performances, foods, handicrafts, and participatory activities.” Supply, on the other hand, engages a money-driven outlook: “on the supply side, heritage tourism is widely looked to as a tool for community economic development and is often actively promoted by local governments and private businesses.”

Often, heritage tourism offers a community an outlet for constructing and disseminating an historical narrative, which can establish and reinforce collective community pride. However, communities engaged in heritage tourism require a balancing of multiple, often conflicting forces comprised of numerous stakeholders. Economics, the locals’ quality of life, as well as tourist expectations for visiting heritage tourism sites are factors in this equation. Tourism in historic districts requires a level of cooperation and collaboration between tourists, residents and business owners to ensure the satisfaction of all parties involved. Doing so necessitates the establishment of touristic boundaries and limitations to guarantee that “tourism does not destroy the very heritage that attracts visitors in the first place,” while making these heritage attractions touristically appealing and engaging. Those responsible for orchestrating heritage tourism sites and presentations are challenged with maintaining quality and perceived authenticity while focusing on preservation and protection of the visited area’s resources.

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Chhabra, 704.
Tourist motivations in visiting heritage sites is a potent subject of scrutiny. Poria et al offer substantive data on the behavioral patterns of heritage tourists through an analysis of visitors to Israel’s Wailing Wall. The authors assert that sites should be conceptualized with reference to the tourist’s belief in a site’s relevance to, and instrumentation in, their own history and heritage: “It is suggested that those who perceive a site as a part of their personal heritage are the basis of the phenomenon called heritage tourism, and they are distinguished from others by their behavior.”9 Their study concludes that heritage sites are so determined by intentional, self-identified and invested tourists, not by intrinsic and essential qualities of the site itself. Accordingly, heritage tourists are intentional, not accidental tourists.

Such studies are aimed at heritage site planners, interpreters and managers who could benefit from the knowledge that “there are differences between heritage tourists and tourists at heritage places” [italics in original].10 The authors argue that tourists with the strongest perceptions of sites as a part of their heritage are some of the most valuable: they are most drawn to sites, are most emotionally moved, and most likely to revisit.

Touristic motivation and expectation is intimately tied to authenticity, a vital component of heritage tourism literature. Past discussions of authenticity examine cultural products like performances, festivals, and characteristics of heritage sites where an authentic experience is equated with a “sense of the genuine,” and the culture and traditions on display are somehow understood as real and true. The quest for the authentic relies on the tourist desire to escape from

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10 Ibid, 249
the quotidian, “based upon the belief that authentic experience resides outside the boundary of everyday life in contemporary society.”\textsuperscript{11}

Heritage tourism scholars have generated a considerable amount of work measuring authenticity as a tourist perception as opposed to a stable, objective and quantifiable reality. This perception is driven by nostalgia, “a universal catchword for looking back.” The focus on nostalgia as an impetus for authentic experience is contingent on recreation and performance of “some past condition,” whether real or imagined.\textsuperscript{12} The fulfillment of touristic nostalgia and thus a sense of authenticity can vary based on a number of factors including tourists’ gender, place of origin, income level, etc.

Increasingly, tourism scholars are critiquing heritage as an overly-romantic social construction for touristic display and consumption. For Waitt, tourism’s portrayal of heritage often diverges from historical record proving antithetical to documented events, instead representing “an interpretation of past events” catering to the interests of business owners, city officials, and other tourism proponents. In a study of The Rocks precinct in Australia, Waitt notes that, “a common criticism...is that what is marketed as “history” is just one version of the truth, often bearing only a faint and extremely partial resemblance to past events as documented in various alternative sources.”\textsuperscript{13} Heritage sites sometimes portray and capitalize on falsified, selective or skewed histories. According to Waitt, the danger in constructed heritage for tourism interpretation lies in the potential preclusion of other versions and sources of history. Waitt voices his concern in his analysis of The Rocks:

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{11} Chhabra, 705
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
The political implications of this study are far from trivial in contemporary Australian society which debates indigenous land-rights and claims equivalence of cultures and peoples under an ideology of multiculturalism. These voiced political concerns are rendered neutral and replaced by nostalgic notions of European national origins and an urban idyll, interpreted in plaques by a narrative of a tranquilized past, peopled by an idealized folk forming a unified, homogenous, conflict-free, and patriarchal society.\textsuperscript{14}

Nonetheless, heritage tourism proffers a valuable platform for communities to filter and depict essential cultural characteristics. Oftentimes, heritage tourism strengthens a community’s sense of itself and its values, but as culture is publicly presented, culture is also influenced.

According to O’Conner, 

\begin{quote}
individual and personal identities are constructed through interaction with others and determined largely by the ways in which we are perceived and treated by them, so too are cultural and national identities constructed from the representations which certain people both inside and outside our culture produce for us. The way in which we see ourselves is substantially determined by the way in which we are seen by others.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

Collective identity is influenced through a reciprocal process involving tourists and locals: cultural identity is not static, and exposure to tourists impacts a community’s self-perception.

While local cultures communicate and portray collective characteristics to visitors, visitors in turn communicate what they find valuable and attractive about a culture.

Many heritage tourism sites thrive on the portrayal of subcultures. Gupta and Ferguson assert that this interpretive approach isolates and favors “exotic” periods of history over the blended, unified and acculturated aspects of a site: “the idea of ‘subcultures’ attempts to preserve the idea of distinct ‘cultures’ while acknowledging the relation of different cultures to a dominant

\begin{footnotes}
\item[14] Ibid.
\item[15] Ibid, 319
\end{footnotes}
culture within the same geographical and territorial space.”16 That selective construction of heritage for tourist consumption often hinges on the depiction of subcultures promotes the perception of these subcultures as exceptional, forever reiterating these groups as lesser cultures, isolated in time and space, outside of the cultural whole.

With the rise of mainstream interest in heirloom and heritage foods, tourism scholars, ecological anthropologists and geographers have begun devoting more energy to analyzing this impact on heritage tourism. Bottone and Maguire note that increasing numbers of tourists are drawn to sites home to rare and regionally-specific foods: “bestowing of provenance to a specific cuisine or a single food item...has become a recent signifier of credibility” in addition to a “successful marketing ploy.”17 Cultural characteristics connote a sense of identity for residents, and yet are driving sources of fascination for visitors. Bottone and Maguire argue that food is often the closest a visitor can come to experiencing a culture’s way of life.

With this scholarship in mind, I offer this paper as a case study of the Datil pepper’s symbolic function in St. Augustine’s heritage tourism. The process of symbolizing food in a heritage tourism context offers a socially acceptable commodification of ethnicity both because of the economic opportunity this process affords and because the symbol has room to signify different meanings in private and public spheres. Through outlets such as festivals and public celebrations, purchasable foodstuffs, and cookbooks, the St. Augustine heritage tourism market articulates and affirms the Datil pepper’s local importance and its symbolic reach.

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Chapter One provides an overview of the history of the Minorcans in Florida, their foodways, the complicated mythology of the Datil pepper, and the contestation surrounding the pepper. A discussion of tourism in Florida follows in Chapter Two, where specific attention is given to St. Augustine and the portrayal of Minorcan culture. Chapter Three discusses contemporary touristic depictions of the Datil pepper in festivals, consumable products, and cookbooks.

18 Throughout the paper I refer to the “Minorcans,” reflecting the English spelling. Many Minorcans and St. Augustine community members prefer the Catalan “Menorcan” spelling. In places where interviewees and sources use “Menorcan,” I retain the Catalan spelling.
CHAPTER ONE

Minorcans in Florida

Until England took formal control of Florida in 1763, Spanish St. Augustine had floundered as a military outpost, valuable only for its strategic location. Recognizing a potential profit in the rich Florida soil, the English set about “transform[ing] the province into a colony, populated with agriculturalists, not soldiers.”¹ Together East Florida governor James Grant and naturalists William Bartram and Bernard Romans embarked on an advertising campaign promoting Florida, “paint[ing] a beautiful picture of East Florida, describing the many advantages of settling in this tropical paradise.”² To entice settlement and colonization in the new territory, the governor emphasized the land’s potential as a venue for the production and exportation of goods, and offered land grants for up to 20,000 acres to prospectors.³

By 1767, affluent speculators had acquired 122 land grants in East Florida, the “major attraction” of the province.⁴ Among these was Andrew Turnbull, a Scottish physician practicing in London. Turnbull secured a tract of over 100,000 acres seventy-five miles south of St. Augustine. He called his land near Mosquito Inlet “New Smyrna” in honor of his wife’s home region of Smyrna, Greece. Turnbull hoped to cultivate a variety of cash crops valuable to English

² Ibid, 25.
³ Ibid, 23.
⁴ Ibid.
manufacturers. Chief among these was indigo, for the richly hued dye so favored in Europe. Turnbull had spent much time in the countries of the Mediterranean—which, indeed, he had married a Greek woman—and believed the climate to be similar to Florida’s. Turnbull noted the success of indigo in these countries and reasoned that natives of this region would be best suited to fulfill his plantation ambitions in East Florida.

During Turnbull’s active recruitment of workers from Greece, Italy and the Balearic Islands, Minorca was experiencing food shortages and drought. Visions of more promising opportunities in Florida helped persuade many of the island’s residents to sign on with Turnbull. The Minorcan contingent quickly outnumbered the other populations, and the polyglot group embarked from Minorca in the spring of 1768. Turnbull’s endeavor seemed ill-fated from the beginning: Only 1,255 of the initial 1,403 colonists survived the voyage from Minorca to New Smyrna, and arrangements made only been made for 500 colonists in Florida. There was an immediate shortage of food, water, clothing, housing and other supplies.

Turnbull contracted his workers from five to ten years, but the plantation’s finances were precarious and Turnbull seldom upheld his agreement to release the workers from indenture. In Mullet on the Beach, Patricia Griffin writes of the extremity of the plantation experience: “by the end of 1768 a total of 450 people had died, a rate of 320.74 per thousand, a population crash equaling that of a natural disaster such as a flood or an earthquake.” Indeed, plantation

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2 Beeson, 42.

3 Ibid, 45.
conditions proved so severe that 964 colonists perished in a nine-year period from afflictions such as malnutrition, malaria, scurvy and gangrene.⁴

In 1777, a select group of Minorcan representatives appealed to Florida’s governor, John Moultrie, for intervention. Several gave sworn depositions against Turnbull and his inhumane treatment. One such story accounts for three men who were “very weak with hunger and bad usage, and were not able to fetch much grass, for which Turnbull whipt them severely with the Horse Whip every morning and if they happened to fetch some Oysters or fish, they were taken away so that this Deponent and many others were obliged to kill snakes and any other vermin, or otherwise starve.”⁵ The laborers voided their contract and fled from the plantation in 1777 while Turnbull was in England. They sought asylum in St. Augustine and obtained refuge and security from Governor Moultrie on behalf of the British government. Many Minorcan families were granted parcels of land to settle and farm in St. Augustine and its surrounding environs. Today, an estimated 25,000 to 26,000 Minorcan descendants still live in St. Augustine.

**Foodways**

The severe plantation environment in New Smyrna made traditional Minorcan practices difficult to maintain. Colonists had to adapt to New World alternatives and learn to survive in conditions of servitude.⁶ The difficult process of acculturation is evident in the accounts of New World Minorcan foodways. Griffin reports a bleak diet for the early Minorcan laborers:

> The food rationed by Turnbull to the settlers was meager at best and by some accounts was taken communally...each person was granted a quart of maize per day, presumably in the form of hominy grits, and two ounces of pork per week. [One scholar notes] that

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⁵ Ibid, 40.

⁶ Ibid, 59.
‘they were forced to join all together in one mess, and at the beat of a vile drum, to come to a common copper, from whence their hominy was ladled out to them.’ He believed that, ‘this might have sufficed with the help of fish which abounds in the lagoon, but they were denied the liberty of fishing.’

As one may expect, these accounts of paltry food rations and limited food sources conflict with Turnbull’s, who described an abundance of foodstuffs available to workers.

Upon migration to St. Augustine, the Minorcans took more control over their diets. Colonists kept domestic animals such as pigs and cows for protein sources and often sold chickens in St. Augustine markets. Animals familiar to the Old World Minorcans, such as goats and sheep, were introduced but did not thrive.

A portion of colonists’ diets was procured from kitchen gardens, which householders cultivated in their spare time. The land was noted for its fertility, yielding common crops like Indian corn, peas, beans, potatoes, peppers, onions, greens and cucumbers. Minorcans enjoyed watermelon not only for its taste but for its curative properties. Beehives were also common.

Today, a number of Minorcan dishes have gained notoriety as quintessentially Minorcan. These recipes reflect frugality, economy and the proclivity to extend limited foodstuffs, and to commemorate defunct traditions no longer practiced amongst the Minorcan community. Indeed, Carol Lopez Bradshaw, Minorcan descendent and president of the Menorcan Cultural Society, says of early reliance on harvested, hunted and gathered foods, “you had to survive; you didn’t have anywhere to go to a store.” Bradshaw describes St. Augustine-Minorcan food as “basic” and often in adherence to religious prescriptions:

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7 Ibid, 39
8 Ibid, 59.
9 Carol Lopez Bradshaw, interview with the author, 17 July 2013.
We ate a lot of fish: mullet, and stuff like that and—and you could go get it. You had to...eat fish on Fridays back in those days because Catholics did that. So everybody headed to the beach on Thursday and caught all their fish to eat Friday. Mullet is a very strong fish and you can't save it very long. So when you catch it you eat it within the first two days if you let it go that long. But it’s a delicacy to us...I found that they were used to that because that’s what they had on the island [of Minorca]...They were used to that kind of a fish.¹⁰

The role of Datil peppers in present-day Minorcan cooking cannot be overstated, though precisely when the Minorcan community adopted the pepper is unclear. And while it is improbable that the Minorcans transported the Datil to Florida, it is likely that they bestowed the name “Datil.” The pods of the pepper are reminiscent of the fruit of of the date palm, called “dátil” in both Catalan and Spanish.¹¹ Frank Usina, Minorcan descendent and St. Augustine resident, notes the practicality of incorporating Datil peppers in daily cooking:

Not having refrigeration, it was hard to keep foods fresh. Particularly meats or fish. So a lot of things we use, spices, didn't grow in this part of the world for the most part. They didn't grow in Europe for the most part. They were valuable, so I imagine the average

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¹⁰ Ibid.
¹¹ Andrews, 144.
person didn't have access to spices. Datil peppers here were certainly something you had access to [in St. Johns County]. And you might have to conceal the taste of something once in a while, and I guarantee you that sufficient Datil pepper will conceal the taste.\textsuperscript{12}

The fromajades tradition is religious in nature.\textsuperscript{13} “Fromajades” refers at once to Minorcan folk songs and a turnover-style cheese pastry. Historically, the Fromajades Serenade took place the night before Easter: on this evening the young Minorcan men grouped together and traveled through town serenading residents. Gifts of food—fromajades, in particular—were bestowed on the young men in exchange.\textsuperscript{14} Cookbooks still include fromajades recipes, though the serenade ceremony is no longer practiced in Florida. These pastries are sometimes served at larger Minorcan events as exemplars of Minorcan cooking. Mary Ellen Masters spoke of a recent gathering of ladies who made batches of fromajades for the annual Saint Ambrose Catholic Church fair in Elkton, Florida:

The old story is that the guys would go through the streets of the cities in Minorcan serenading the ladies, and they would give them these fromajades as a treat. And they're just a rolled out dough with cheese and a little butter, and you press it over until it looks like a miniature turnover. And you make a cross in it so the cheese can bubble up. Some people put cinnamon on it or you can eat it plain.\textsuperscript{15}

Minorcan clam chowder is a red, Manhattan-style chowder. While the chowder is sometimes eaten in Minorcan homes, it is usually enjoyed in larger events and venues, such as the Saint Ambrose Catholic Church fair. Indeed, many printed recipes call for gallons of clams and several pounds of potatoes and onions. These high quantities of ingredients are most

\textsuperscript{12} Frank Usina, interview with the author, 26 July 2013.

\textsuperscript{13} “Fromajades” enjoy a range of spellings. Alternatives include fromajadas, fromajadis, fromajardis, formatjades, among others.

\textsuperscript{14} Griffin, 73.

\textsuperscript{15} Mary Ellen Masters, conversation with the author, 3 November 2012.
certainly listed with an eye towards feeding a crowd.\textsuperscript{16} The dish receives exposure from its popularity in restaurants across St. Augustine, where a number of highly-trafficked establishments boast this chowder as menu item. New variations on this dish spring up each year with the annual Great Chowder Debate.\textsuperscript{17}

Pilau is a tomato-based meat and rice dish that generally features chicken, shrimp or sausage. However, a number of alternative pilau recipes exist, including “Egg Pilau” and “Ripe Olive Pilau,” among others.\textsuperscript{18} Masters reports that her “mother always said that pilau was just something to stretch other food that was leftover.” Minorcan families would toss in any available ingredients, but the base was standard: “You fry down onions and tomatoes and celery and some people put bell pepper in it. Fry it down and make like a thick, dark roux and then you put rice—meat, rice and your spices in it. And cook it till it's done.”\textsuperscript{19}

Frank Usina recalls the pilaus of his childhood, often made from seafood caught along North Beach, north of St. Augustine, as well as pork and beef from hogs and cattle run by family members before Florida’s fencing laws of 1949:

Pilau is our local version of what you can add to rice to make it go, a little bit go as far as you can. Traditionally of course it was shrimp pilau but then there's pork pilau, there's sausage pilau, there's ham and bean pilau, and anything else that you've got that you can stick in the pot with some rice and onions and a little Datil pepper, tomatoes. And it makes a meal go a long way. Particularly if you've got a big family.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{16} The family of V.J. Usina, “Clam Chowder,” \textit{Menorcan Family Favorites}. Menorcan Cultural Society of St. Augustine, Florida. 35.


\textsuperscript{18} Joan Adams Wicklham. \textit{Food Favorites of St. Augustine}. St. Augustine: C.F. Hamblen, Inc. 22.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{20} Frank Usina, interview with the author, 26 July 2013.
Mary Ellen and Lawrence Masters remember elder relatives and friends making Minorcan sausage: meat—usually pork, but sometimes pork mixed with venison—is ground with toasted fennel seeds, Datil peppers, and a combination of other spices, if desired. This mixture is placed in a pillow case or a few layers of cheesecloth, and a quantity of vinegar is poured over top. The vinegar works its way through the meat, drawing out blood and preventing spoilage. The mixture is then stuffed into casings and oftentimes smoked if a family was without refrigeration.\textsuperscript{21} Carol Lopez Bradshaw recalls the variations in locally made sausage:

Some...would make sausage, a regular sausage and then they had some that was Datil pepper sausage which they would grind up the Datil peppers and put in there. And then they had one that was gross, they called blood pudding and they used some of the blood in there...My brother liked it. But I didn’t like it. So they would make the three different kinds...and then the families for doing all the work would take some sausage home with them. And the same way with the sugarcane; you got your syrup and all that to take home with you.\textsuperscript{22}

A defunct yet once popular dish is gopher stew, made from the gopher tortoise. John Barnes remembers the stew, which was at one time a Minorcan staple:

Now the gopher stew thing was good too now back in those days...I haven't had any [since it became illegal] but it was done Minorcan style. You know, it’s a stew...and they’d put the Datil pepper in there, you know. So it had the Datil pepper flavor in a stew...they made it with turtle, chopped up pieces of turtle...It was like, really good.\textsuperscript{23}

In a note published in a family recipe for “Minorcan Gopher Stew,” Mary Ellen Masters explains that her recipe for gopher stew had been “handed down from our Minorcan ancestors. My mother

\textsuperscript{21} Mary Ellen and Lawrence Masters, conversation with the author, 3 November 2012.
\textsuperscript{22} Carol Lopez Bradshaw, interview with the author, 17 July 2013.
\textsuperscript{23} John Barnes, interview with the author, 12 October 2012.
taught me how to make stew. We had this on Fridays, because of the Catholic rule of abstaining from meat.”

Frank Usina recalls how gophers were prepared for the stew:

First you got to catch a gopher. They are a turtle, they have a hard shell. Best thing: first you've got to do is when he gets his head stuck out and he wants to crawl off somewhere you cut his head off. Which my grandmother did with her trusty hatchet...You take the hatchet and you cut down the side of the shell because it's all hard. Cut down both sides with the hatchet. Some people use saws but I think you got fewer pieces of bone with a hatchet. I don't remember this too well. You have the legs, which they're stumpy little legs...They've got toenails. Their neck is articulated. It's got a whole bunch of little bones so it bends. And it's a very rich meat.

Usina further acknowledges the importance and prominence of gopher stew in St. Johns county culture:

Gophers, gopher stew. Traditional, yes. The Moccasin Branch was the big political event of the year. This was way back, not before radio, but certainly before television. And if you're going to run for politics in St. Johns County, you'd better be at Moccasin Branch. You can have a chance to stand in back of the wagon or a pickup truck and say what you had to say. But gopher stew was one of the staples at Moccasin Branch, as was pilau.

In 1987, the gopher’s dwindling numbers drew the attention of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the species was listed as a Threatened Species under the Endangered Species Act. Hunting and consuming the tortoise is now illegal, though some interviewees suggest that gophers are still discreetly hunted.

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25 Frank Usina, interview with the author, 26 July 2013.

26 Ibid.

Many Minorcans keep a reserve of “mull,” a homemade concentrated tomato product used as a foundation in such Minorcan classics as clam chowder and pilau. Johnny Barnes keeps a portion in his restaurant refrigerator:

They call it a fry-down when they start doing it...they put the bacon or the salt pork and the onions and the peppers and the marjoram and thyme and salt and pepper and the Datil pepper and you fry that down. And then when you add your tomatoes, once it’s done they called it a mull. And they kept a little jar of—container of that in their refrigerator. It keeps forever, you know. And I got some...we keep it in our refrigerators....the longer it sits the better it gets. It’s like a tomato paste.28

Additionally, Datil peppers are popular in a variety of condiments including pepper jellies, vinegars and mustards. Carol Lopez Bradshaw describes the vinegar: “Datil pepper vinegar, you take a bottle and put your Datil peppers in and put your regular vinegar on it, you know and close—seal it up and let it you know age a little bit and it—it’ll curl your toes.”29 Most notably however, is the ketchup based Datil pepper sauce sometimes known locally as “Bottled

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28 John Barnes, interview with the author, 12 October 2012.
29 Carol Lopez Bradshaw, interview with the author, 17 July 2013.
Hell.” Datil pepper sauces occupy tables in St. Augustine seafood restaurants, and may be found for sale everywhere from grocery stores to gas stations and farm stands.

The Datil’s prevalence in clam chowders, pilaus, sausage and condiments is reinforced in oral history interviews and recorded recipes. Indeed, in some cases, the inclusion of Datil peppers in Minorcan specialties distinguish them from other more generic recipes for chowders, stews, and sausage.

**Mystery of the Datil Pepper**

Given the popularity and centrality of the Datil pepper in much of St. Augustine’s cuisine, there is a surprising lack of documentation regarding the pepper’s arrival in the north Florida area. The popular local lore holds that the pepper traveled to New Smyrna with the indentured Minorcans. Indeed, this lore is perpetuated through generations of family members, and cited by many interviewees as “what we’ve always heard.” Some St. Augustine locals recount tales of Minorcan women sewing Datil pepper seeds into their skirts before boarding Turnbull’s ships, so as to sustain a cultural tradition in the new colony. These stories are consistent with what has become an assumed history of the Datil.

Indeed, this widespread origin myth is vigorously reinforced and reiterated. In the historic fiction *The Minorcan Yoke*, author Nancy Pellicer Dyer imagines the experience of Turnbull’s Minorcan settlers. Before the tale’s hero Don Francisco Pellicer de Alayor boards the *New Fortune* for transportation to Florida from Minorca, he stocks up on provisions: “Francisco entered the shop and purchased some tobacco, Datil pepper seeds, dried fruits, salted meat, and writing implements, a ledger, chalk, quill and ink. The merchant bundled the items, and
Francisco made his way toward the wharf.” The minor inclusion of Datil pepper seeds in Francisco’s last Minorcan purchases speaks to the prevalence of the mythology.

The lore is certainly popular among cookbook authors. *Food Favorites of St. Augustine* makes the connection between the Datil pepper and Minorca in a recipe stating, “the Minorcans carried the seeds of their beloved ‘Datil pepper’ to their homes in the New World.” Later, the cookbook notes the prominence of Datil peppers in Minorcan, Spanish and St. Augustine cooking, calling the pepper “one of St. Augustine’s own, Spanish or Minorcan in origin.”

Some, however, are reluctant to advocate the Datil pepper’s connection to Minorca. Alternative theories have surfaced against the Datil pepper as a Minorcan transplant. Botanist Jean Andrews explores the probability of the Datil pepper arriving from the Mediterranean in “A Botanical Mystery: The Elusive Trail of the Datil Pepper of St. Augustine.” Andrews explores the geography of pepper varieties as well as the Minorcan penchant for utilizing spices. Although

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a 1756 history of Minorca by J. Armstrong includes “Guinea-Pepper” in a catalogue of cultivated and common foods on the island, Andrews recognizes it perhaps as a red Cayenne type of *Capsicum annuum* and not the *Capsicum chinense* known as the Datil pepper.\(^{32}\) Armstrong writes, “here [on Minorca] is a great plenty of Guinea-Pepper, the green pods of which the Minorquins are especially fond of. Of these a valuable pickle is made. Such as they suffer to hand until the seeds are ripe, acquire a red color, and being dried, and reduced to a fine Powder, are much used in their cookery, and are well known to the World under the Name of Cayan-Butter.”\(^{33}\) The Guinea Pepper originated in Mesoamerica and disseminated across the world with the Portuguese spice trade. By the time Turnbull recruited indentured laborers, the Minorcans would have been well acquainted with the Guinea Pepper.\(^{34}\)

Andrews speculates that the Datil may have come from the Caribbean to Florida during the second Spanish period, when Florida was retroceded to Spain in 1783. Islands such as Cuba and Jamaica were favorable climates for *C. chinense*, and as exiled Spanish citizens returned to Florida from the West Indies, perhaps they brought Datil seeds with them.\(^{35}\) That the Minorcans had long been familiar with hot peppers only ensured that the Datil pepper would be readily adopted and nurtured by the Floridian indentured workers.

A 1937 *St. Augustine Record* article seems to support the Datil pepper’s connection with the Caribbean. St. Augustine historian David Nolan turned up the article, in which anecdotal evidence points to the Datil pepper’s arrival from the Caribbean. R. A. Ponce, the article’s

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\(^{34}\) Andrews, 136.

\(^{35}\) Ibid, 140.
informant, links the pepper to a St. Augustine resident named S. B. Valls, manufacturer of Ancient City Brand fruit preserves.\textsuperscript{36} Valls purportedly sent to Santiago, Cuba "for seed of the Spanish Datil pepper."\textsuperscript{37} Ponce remembers the Datil pepper spreading from Valls’ original seed to surrounding settlements. The article asks for more information regarding the Datil and its mysterious arrival: "more ways of using Datil peppers are wanted and also anything relating to its being known here previous to 1880, if possible."\textsuperscript{38}

Additional anecdotes have been collected by St. Augustinians curious to explore the history behind Turnbull’s laborers. Patricia Griffin, scholar on early Minorcan history, recalls a trip she took to Minorca for comparative cultural research. Though Minorcan cuisine often hinges on peppers, she noted that peppered Minorcan dishes were in fact quite mild compared to the Datil’s fiery complexion. Similarly, Mary Ellen Masters recalls a Minorcan pediatrician in a neighboring town of Palatka, Florida, who requested some native Minorcan peppers from relatives on the island. Of the Minorcan variety, Masters observed, "well they don't even remotely look like our peppers. They look more like chili peppers, or jalapeños than they do the Datils...And he said the people over there don't know what a Datil pepper is, by that name anyway."

Agriculture scientists and horticulturists have also weighed in on the mystery. According to Daniel Cantliffe, a University of Florida Professor of Horticultural Sciences, the University of Florida is currently working on a project to show how Datils relate to each other but differ from

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\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
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other pepper families. Cantliffe writes, “pollen dating has shown that the group that they belong to originated in the Upper Amazon River area. They obviously did not originate on the Isle of Minorca or any area surrounding the European continent.” In a presentation to the St. Johns County Commission in September 2013, Cantliffe says,

The one thing I want to make completely clear to everyone: St. Johns County is the only place on the planet that this plant, the Datil, has come from and that we know it as being. It has migrated out after being here 235 years due to its economic drive as well as what it does for flavoring food...It originated and came from St. Augustine. We [pepper experts] have looked around the planet; we can’t find it anywhere else. We can’t find it but here... You have a unique plant material that is only coming from here.

Cantliffe refers to the multiple evolutions undergone by the Datil pepper during its journey to its current home of St. Augustine.

By now the Datil has certainly adapted in response to selective breeding, mutations, new climates and new environments. Thus, in a sense, searching for the true Datil pepper is futile: it has been in St. Augustine all along. The Datil pepper has been bred in such a localized context that it is likely an entirely different specimen from what was introduced to north Florida over 200 years ago. This phenomenon is not unheard of; the renowned Louisiana Tabasco pepper underwent generations of similar isolation and selection, resulting in a unique fruit unlike those of the original Mexican plants.

By its very nature, the Datil pepper is a product of continuous change, evolution and adaptation; to be sure, this process continues today. Yet a perception persists of the pepper as a pure, unchanging and genetically-static St. Augustine specialty: growers and producers assert the

39 For one, Cantliffe cites habaneras as “cousins” to the Datil pepper.
41 Andrews, 144.
42 Ibid, 134.
value of “true” Datils. Frank Usina, a Datil pepper grower, insists that a “true” Datil pepper hinges on a regulated criteria:

It is only one Datil pepper; there is no such thing as 'super Datil' or 'sweet Datil' or 'little Datils' or 'big Datils' or anything of the sort. There's a single pepper, a single Datil pepper. It's the same variety. They've been crossed and mixed, but—and called a lot of different things, but there's only one Datil pepper...[cross-pollinating] alters [the pepper] genetically, I guess you would call it. It changes the structure, like I say, the heat level, the flavor. So it's best that you—probably the best way to keep from that happening is only growing one type. Just grow nothing but Datils and you don't have to worry about them crossing with something else. But I like bell peppers and we'll plant bell peppers in the spring. But I keep them well away. I stay at least 200 feet because I know they'll cross.43

Similarly, Marcia McQuaig of Minorcan Datil Pepper Products prefers the uncontaminated “true Datil” for her products:

I want to stick with really what the true Datil, the lineage of that. So I don't mess with that....It has like a purple line...they always told me it was from the sun, you know, that it would create just this pretty purple little line or streak of purpleness in it. And through the years I saw less and less of that and I thought that was weird. But you do start to see it again. So then I just really feel like, that's how they always were back in the day, even when we grew them.44

Such views ignore and curtail the pepper’s generations-long evolution.

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43 Frank Usina, interview with the author, 18 July 2013.
44 Marcia McQuaig, interview with the author, 23 July 2013.
CHAPTER TWO

“Florida is tourism. Every modern image of the state evokes travel for pleasure. To most outsiders, Florida is one big theme park not a state but a ‘magic kingdom’ of dreams and fantasies, where real life, with its mundane cares, is effectively banished.”

Tourism in Florida

Florida’s tourism industry rests on a pervasive perception of the state’s inexhaustible natural beauty, curative climate and infinite resources. This carefully constructed image of an eden has long been the bedrock to Florida’s reputation as a vacation paradise, a potent image that is remade, reiterated and reinforced. By the mid-1800s, Florida had become recognized as a restorative haven. In Sunshine Paradise, Tracy J. Revels notes that many of the state’s natural springs were developed into spas, and eager resort managers touted Florida water as a panacea for hosts of afflictions:

efficacious in all forms of consumption, scrofula, jaundice, and other bilious affectations, chronic dysentery and diarrhea, diseases of the uterus, chronic rheumatism and gout, dropsy, gravel, neuralgia, tremor, syphilis, erysipelas, tetter, ringworm and itch.

As the Civil War brewed and Florida aligned itself with the Confederacy, so slowed the trickle of vacationing northerners. By the war’s end, the state had been wrung of much of its resources and population. Expanded access to Florida’s once-impenetrable interior via riverboats

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2 Ibid 16
and soon railroads opened new spaces for tourism ventures and helped stimulate a lagging tourism economy.

Post Civil War, vacation interest in Florida shifted from curative travel to outdoor recreation such as hunting, fishing and boating. These sought-out experiences accompanied a change in mindset of the American middle class, who “began to view travel and tourism not as a sinful waste of time, but as a natural complement to labor.”¹ Increasing numbers of “touring” visitors looking for “improving activities” demanded hotels, restaurants, guide companies and other amenities across the state.²

Together, oil baron Henry Morrison Flagler and railroad tycoon Henry Bradley Plant constructed a series of hotels throughout Florida, lavishly transforming the region into “a millionaire’s playground.”³ What perhaps began as an indulgent rivalry in the 1880s proved to be an economic boon for the state’s tourism industry, not only drawing in wealthy tourists but establishing railroad lines the length of the state and opening south Florida for development. Flagler’s hotel empire helped facilitate a shift in perception of Florida as an old Confederate state into a region offering luxury and leisure: “Flagler perhaps agreed...that if the South were a hundred years behind the North, then Florida and St. Augustine were even farther back in time.”⁴

The twentieth century ushered in new opportunities for travelers of all classes and income levels to experience Florida. 1900 through the end of World War II proffered new conveniences conducive to vacationing: Cars and air-conditioning allowed visitors to vacation in Florida in

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¹ Ibid 23
² Ibid, 29.
³ Ibid, 40.
⁴ Ibid, 41.
ways never before possible. This “grand new age of tourism” was one of “promoters, publicity stunts, garish pictures, and lovely lies.” The Sunshine State established itself as “America’s leisure paradise, and began moving away from its designation as a ‘Southern’ state in terms of culture.”

Florida tourism’s “Age of Whimsy” lasted from 1945 till 1971, during which visitors to the state perceived attractions as “garish, cheesy, and of questionable authenticity.” Florida settled into its image as “a state of the imagination,” offering amusement parks like Disney World, which opened in 1971. Florida’s natural attractions, like the Everglades National Park and the state’s various sandy beaches, added to this sentiment. One 1962 Miami-based tourism announcement read, “you don’t have to be a millionaire to acquire a tan in February.”

The Disney era brought an end to the majority of Florida’s small, family-run businesses, and concentrated tourism in the Orlando area. Disney offshoots like Busch Gardens and Universal Studios bloomed in Orlando from the 1970s through the 1990s. To cope with the declining tourist numbers, many Florida cities like Key West and Pensacola refashioned and renovated historic downtowns to entice visitors.

Today, Florida’s heritage tourism is constantly embattled with the inventive, fantasy-based tourism for which the state has become so famous. Revels places the shift in relief: “Once noted for its fierce Seminoles, fragrant orange groves, and cattle-herding Crackers, Florida has become the province of talking mice, fairy princesses, and jolly pirates.”

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5 Ibid, 64.
6 Ibid, 2.
7 Ibid, 103.
8 Ibid, 116.
9 Ibid, 1.
and districts compete with theme parks and fight for survival to make themselves touristically attractive.\textsuperscript{10}

Despite a climate prone to hurricanes and an environment infamous for its bugs, mugginess and alligators, the state shows little sign of slowing its tourism campaign. Over 80 percent of Florida jobs are in the service industry, which accommodates the needs of the 87 million visitors that flock to the state yearly.\textsuperscript{11} Moreover, without a state income tax, Florida’s economy relies on revenue produced by sales and hotel taxes. Revels notes that Florida has come to be defined by its obsequiousness to tourists: “There is little to no hope of reclaiming any other identity for Florida; America would never relinquish its favorite toy.”\textsuperscript{12}

**Tourism in St. Augustine**

Located on the northeast coast of Florida in St. Johns County, “The Nation’s Oldest City” is Florida’s pioneer in tourism, owing its title to a legacy as the longest continually occupied European settlement in the United States. Indeed, Juan Ponce de Leon, the first European to sight Floridian soil, is credited as the first St. Augustine tourist with his purported search for a “fountain of youth.” Today, St. Augustine is popular among tourists for its quaint, old world feel: “The city has never lost its atmosphere of ages past, with its horse-drawn carriages, the old fort, coquina rock houses with Spanish balconies, and the fanciful combination of Spanish, Minorcan and Southern food.”\textsuperscript{13} The numerous sites of overlapping historical periods may be infinitely interpreted, which holds immense promise for historical and heritage tourism ventures.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid, 138


\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, 1.

Florida’s statehood in 1845 opened the doors for tourism prospectors, who quickly carved out an image of the town as a welcoming, curative haven for invalids. The fresh sea breezes and balmy conditions were touted as healing and restorative. Indeed, “On the Influence of the Climate of St. Augustine, Florida on Pulmonary Affections,” an 1830 pamphlet by Dr. John C. Warren of Harvard, evaluates the suitability of the St. Augustine climate for afflicted individuals hoping to “seek refuge from the northern winters.” Though Warren finds St. Augustine’s infrastructure less than favorable for supporting vacationing convalescents, he concludes that “the climate [is] eminently favorable,” and that “the air of the city...has proved remarkably restorative in some cases of apparently regular consumption.”

By 1850, tourism was the foundation of St. Augustine’s economy. The Civil War drained the city of its tourists and devastated the local population. Yet as the state headquarters for the occupying military forces, St. Augustine saw some monetary support from solders seeking entertainment.

By 1887, St. Augustine was once again touting its touristic appeal. The 1886-1887 *Florida Gazetter* attributes the city’s popularity with elite tourists to its historicity coupled with modern facilities:

The notoriety of this place is based chiefly on its historical associations, it being the oldest city in the United States, and on its many relics of Spanish occupancy, including Fort Marion, the cathedral, the city gates, etc. The city, with its quaint architecture, possesses a strong flavor of the past, and annually attracts large numbers of tourists, in whose behalf magnificent hotel accommodations are being provided. The local scenery,

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15 Revels, 13.

enriched with tropical foliage, is of great beauty, and the neighborhood affor[d]s unrivaled...facilities for boating, hunting and fishing.\(^{17}\)

The Gazetter distinguishes St. Augustine as one of the state’s most noted cities at the time, praising St. Augustine’s accessibility via both multiple rail lines and the St. Johns River. Travelers could choose from a variety of “fine hotels, the principal of which are the St. Augustine, Magnolia, Florida House and San Marco,” in addition to “a number of boarding houses.”

The quiet city’s charm soon drew Henry Flagler on a honeymoon visit with his second wife Ida Alice Shours.\(^{18}\) Flagler saw tourism potential in the sleepy beach town and used his “Midas touch” to transform St. Augustine into a veritable “playground for the rich.”\(^{19}\) His opulent Hotel Ponce de Leon and more moderate Alcazar Hotel both opened in 1888, stimulating growth and establishing St. Augustine as a vacation destination for well-to-do snowbirds.

Yet St. Augustine’s elite tourism was short-lived; as the hotel development of Flagler and Plant extended farther south, so too followed the monied tourists. With rich travelers flocking to Palm Beach and Miami, the Nation’s Oldest City quickly became a “turnstile city, catering to those just passing through.” Soon after, St. Augustine suffered from a depression in 1893 and experienced a series of debilitating deep freezes from 1894-1895.\(^{20}\)

St. Augustine followed other Florida cities into the twentieth century era of roadside attractions, opening small theme parks for motorists like the Alligator Farm and the Fountain of

\(^{17}\) “St. Augustine, St. Johns County.” *Florida State Gazetter, 1886-1887.* State Archives of Florida.
\(^{18}\) Ibid, 41.
\(^{19}\) “Henry Flagler’s Influence on St. Augustine,” *St. Augustine Record.* [http://staugustine.com/history/henry-flagler](http://staugustine.com/history/henry-flagler), accessed May 1, 2013.
\(^{20}\) Revels, 54.
Youth. These kitschy parks were popular with World War II servicemen stationed in Jacksonville’s Camp Blanding in the 1940s, and many continue to thrive as St. Augustine institutions. St. Augustine was notoriously inhospitable to African American travelers well through the 1960s, though Butler Beach located ten miles south in addition to American Beach in Jacksonville to the north offered safe recreational spaces for blacks.

Today, St. Augustine orients itself towards family vacationers, though St. Augustine’s cultural tourism industry must compete with Walt Disney World and Orlando’s numerous theme parks. The local response has been to, according to historian David Nolan, “gussy [the city’s history] up, stretch the truth, to fake the buildings, all in the interest of squeezing an extra dollar out of tourists.” Historians have paid considerable attention to the historically-skewed and irrelevant tourist sites of St. Augustine, which include attractions like Ripley’s Believe It or Not Museum and Potter’s Wax Museum. Perhaps the Nation’s Oldest City’s “most famous

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21 Ibid, 88.
22 Ibid, 74.
inauthentic attraction” is the Fountain of Youth, the purported location of Ponce de Leon’s spring granting eternal youth. Mounting evidence, however, suggests that Ponce landed nowhere near the attraction site, nor was he in search of a magical spring.

Such criticism of St. Augustine’s exaggeratedly marketed heritage becomes increasingly important in light of the Oldest City’s impending 450th anniversary of its founding. The commemorative initiative includes programming recognizing “the 500th anniversary of Florida in 2013, the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act in 2014, and the 450th anniversary of the founding of St. Augustine in 2015.” Marketing for the 450th invokes selective yet heroic narratives surrounding the city’s development: “It is a city built on history, courage, knowledge, nature, creativity and discovery. It is a city built by artists, outdoorsmen, entrepreneurs and forward thinkers. It is a city that symbolizes discovery in so many ways.” Organizers invite visitors to “share in our history and...find yourself in our past [italics original].”

Conspicuously absent from this celebrated legacy story is the extensive process of cultural exchange, social concession and adaptations experienced by the multifarious contributing populations of northeast Florida. Notably omitted in this popular historical account are wars waged on the native populations, the institution of slavery and its legacy, and other turbulent events of persecution and social upset.

To be sure, such sanitized cultural tourism can be immensely profitable. Popular heritage tourism districts see increases in jobs, businesses and property taxes. Travel and tourism in 2000 generated $584.3 billion in revenue to the U.S. economy, and is the country’s third largest retail industry. Indeed,

24 Revels, 112.
Travel and tourism directly employs more than 7.8 million people and indirectly supports another 11.5 million jobs, creating 19 million jobs. Visitors to historic sites and cultural attractions stay longer and spend more money than other kinds of tourists. Heritage visitors spend, on average, $631 per trip compared to $457 for all U.S. travelers, and they spend an average of 4.7 nights away from home as compared to 3.4 nights for all other travelers.26

On a local level, such numbers have large implications. For St. Johns County, Florida, visitors spent almost $712 million in 2012, prompting the observation that “tourism is St. Johns County’s economic engine.”27 When done sustainably, heritage tourism can be a lucrative endeavor.

St. Augustine is continuously searching for ways to both improve the efficacy of its tourism and better accommodate increasing numbers of tourists. In 2002, the city sponsored a $25,000 study evaluating the state of heritage tourism in St. Augustine. The resultant report, “Heritage Tourism Assessment & Recommendations for St. Augustine, Florida,” is a comprehensive appraisal of tourism in St. Augustine prepared by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Part of the town’s tourist appeal is

[The] rich history [that] has shaped the city and given it a physical legacy of diversity and beauty from the Castillo de San Marcos to the opulent resorts of the Flagler era. Although only a portion of the City’s heritage is documented and interpreted, it is so compelling that the City draws an estimated 6.2 million visitors each year.28

The report’s authors emphasize a search for, and presentation of, the authentic. “Heritage tourism,” they write, “means traveling to experience the places and activities that authentically

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28 National Trust for Historic Preservation, 4.
represent the stories and people of the past and present. These authentic experiences include irreplaceable historic resources.”\textsuperscript{29}

**The Minorcans in St. Augustine Tourism**

Depictions of St. Augustine’s cultural exceptionalism began to arise in the early 1800s in travelogues of writers, visiting journalists and poets. Early accounts provided impressions of St. Augustine that disseminated and solidified ideas of the city and what it had to offer. These documented anecdotes depicted a diverse and dynamic city and were valuable for attracting tourists and travelers. Glimpses of the unique Minorcan population often appeared in these texts as colorful additions to St. Augustine’s Old World feel.

William Cullen Bryant portrayed distinct and colorful St. Augustine customs that magnified the city’s vibrancy in his *Letters of a Traveler, or Notes of Things seen in Europe and America*. Bryant’s 1843 notes of his St. Augustine visit record the presence of Minorcans in St. Augustine and their maintenance of traditional customs. Among Bryant’s experiences was the Easter’s eve fromajadis serenade:\textsuperscript{30}

Some old customs which the Minorcans brought with them from their native country are still kept up. On the evening before Easter Sunday, about eleven o’clock, I heard the sound of a serenade in the streets. Going out, I found a party of young men, with instruments of music, grouped about the window of one of the dwellings, singing a hymn in honor of the Virgin in Mahonese dialect. They began, as I was told, with tapping on the shutter. An answering knock within had told them that their visit was welcome, and the [sic] immediately began the serenade. If no reply had been heard they would have passed on to another dwelling.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, 6.

\textsuperscript{30} Revels, 13.

\textsuperscript{31} Florida Humanities Council. “Spanish Colonial St. Augustine” \url{http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00067338/00001/1x?search=minorcan}, accessed 3 Dec 2013.
Observations of St. Augustine’s Minorcan populations in the 1848 *Sketches of St. Augustine* by R. K. Sewell are less than favorable. In a *St. Augustine Record* article recalling the text, E. W. Lawson of the St. Augustine Historical Society writes of Sewell’s perceptions of the Minorcans:

They are a peculiar people, and...composed a large proportion of the city’s population. [Sewell] is complimentary about the women, giving them credit for good taste, neatness and industry. The men did not meet with his approval. He characterizes them as lacking in enterprise and without education.\(^{32}\)

By the 1930s and 1940s efforts from the Works Progress Administration encouraged national travel. Authors of the 1939 *Florida: A Guide to the Southernmost State*, compiled by the Federal Writers’ Project for the American Guide Series, provide a snapshot of the Oldest City:

Bicycles are still a favorite means of transportation. Horse-drawn surreys, driven by top-hatted Negroes who solicit fares for sight-seeing trips, are reminiscent of St. Augustine’s early days as a tourist resort. On narrow, twisting side streets, Minorcan restaurants offer pilau (a highly seasoned potpourri of rice with boiled meat, fish, or fowl), fried shrimp, chowders, and gopher (land turtle) stew.\(^{33}\)

The WPA guide may refer to a Minorcan restaurant on Aviles St. run by Clara Lopez Meer. Carol Lopez Bradshaw remembers:

There was one woman, Clara Meer, Clara Lopez Meer that had a restaurant that was Minorcan food. And they cooked pilau and stuff like that probably in the ‘40s, I’ve heard about it, and maybe into the ‘50s. But it was on Aviles Street...she had a bunch of Minorcan women cooking for her. And that’s the only Minorcan restaurant I’ve ever heard about...well, you didn’t go out and eat, you know. You cooked at home, so you made your own clam chowder and—and stuff like that.\(^{34}\)


\(^{34}\) Carol Lopez Bradshaw, interview with the author, 17 July 2013.
William Rose Benét imagined an idyllic St. Augustine in his 559 page autobiographical verse, The Dust Which is God. Published in 1941, the text earned Benét the 1942 Pulitzer Prize and contains perhaps the earliest known literary mention of the datil pepper. Benet was a descendent of the St. Augustine Minorcans and brother to Stephen Vincent Benét. In The Dust Which is God, he fondly recalls St. Augustine: “the seventeenth century city gates . . . the shrimps / out at Capo’s in a jungle of mossed oaks— / with datil pepper sauce! Tea on the lawn / behind the Spanish treasury. . . Usina’s / grove and logs in a trench and roasted oysters.”

The cuisine of old St. Augustine receives an endorsement from Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings in her nationally popular Cross Creek Cookery. Published in 1942, the companion cookbook to Rawling’s memoir Cross Creek documents recipes and anecdotes from Rawling’s time in Florida. Rawlings sympathetically acknowledges the Minorcan history in Florida, and laments her lack of experience with Minorcan cuisine: “I wish that I had more recipes of these [Minorcan] foods to offer. The only one I have been given, have tried and for which I can give the recipe, is gopher [tortoise] stew. It is superb.”

The Datil pepper also makes an appearance in Rawlings’ Cookery. Her recipe for “Stuffed Crab” calls for a “Dash of Tabasco or Datil pepper sauce,” which punctuates the otherwise standard recipe. “Datil pepper sauce,” Rawlings writes, “may be had only in St. Augustine, and a trip for the purpose is almost worth while. The Datil pepper is a small lean yellow-green pepper, Spanish or Minorcan in origin, very hot and of a distinct pungency. The sauce is made by filling a bottle with the whole peppers and covering with vinegar or sherry.”

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35 Benét, William Rose. The Dust Which is God. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1941. 543.
37 Ibid, 85.
Such accounts and impressions of St. Augustine and the Minorcan population penned by well known authors and journalists helped attract tourists to the city. Moreover, these later texts surely played a part in correcting the stigma attached to Minorcan heritage that arose in the mid-1900s. Patricia Griffin remembers the negative connotation attached to a Minorcan family connection.\(^\text{38}\) Carol Lopez Bradshaw confirms this:

Growing up here, no one ever spoke of being Minorcan. They were thought of as low-class people when they first came here...The British didn’t like them because they reminded them of the Spanish, [but] they were Mediterranean. They were olive-skinned. They had dark eyes. They had dark hair. And they didn’t like them, so they were kind of labeled to the side. That’s why they kept to themselves in one area. And then they came out and then eventually they became the sheriff and the postmaster and [occupied other prestigious civic positions]...they are the backbone [of St. Augustine]. But nobody ever spoke of it, so that’s why the language was lost. No one in my family, any generation that I was around, I cannot remember them speaking the language.\(^\text{39}\)

Some descendants altered family names in hopes of better camouflaging themselves into the surrounding community.

However in recent decades, Minorcan heritage has emerged into a more lionized legacy. The contemporary narrative is dominated by the heroic qualities of a people who overcame servitude. For the Minorcans, heritage tourism has been a valuable opportunity to reclaim a tarnished history of bondage to transform it into a saga of celebratory triumph.

Positive representations of Minorcan culture in St. Augustine’s heritage tourism were spearheaded by Xavier Lopez Pellicer, a St. Augustine civic leader and Minorcan descendent who “vowed to be proud of my Minorcan heritage. There was a great feeling among many people that those of Minorcan heritage were second-class citizens.” Pellicer “supported the development, recognition, and preservation of Florida’s Minorcan heritage” through various

\(^{38}\) Patricia Griffin, interview with the author, 23 November 2012.

\(^{39}\) Carol Lopez Bradshaw, interview with the author, 17 July 2013.
efforts: erecting a statue of Father Pedro Camps, priest to the Minorcans in the early Florida years, near St. Augustine’s Cathedral Basilica; consultation for developing the Minorcan Folklife Area at the 1983 Florida Folk Festival; and sponsorship of the 1983 Minorcan Cultural Exchange Tour. Pellicer was chosen as a Great Floridian by the Division of Historical Resources in 2000.\(^{40}\)

Though some Minorcan community members lament a perceived underrepresentation in the arena of St. Augustine’s heritage tourism, efforts of leaders like Pellicer are certainly recognized. One St. Augustine resident alludes to the multifarious and overall positive impacts of the Minorcans:

> While researching my just released book, The Madonnas of St. Augustine [sic], I became aware of how the Minorcans actually ‘saved’ St. Augustine when they arrived from New Smyrna. The town was terribly poor, a hodgepodge of cultures and defunct in religion. These amazing people moved in with their many talents, fished, planted kitchen gardens, remodled [sic] shanty homes and transformed the shakey [sic] garrison town with their lusty, unconquerable spirit. Viva Minorcans!\(^{41}\)

Members within the Minorcan community acknowledge their unique collective ethnic history, while noting an integration into a Floridian host community. Frank Usina conveys how “normalized” the Minorcan contingent has become over generations of residence in St. Johns County.

> I think any people adapt to where they live. I know that history tells us that families that came to Florida and generally called the Minorcans, but there were Greeks, there were French and they were Italian. And Minorca being pretty much a melting pot in itself, because every civilization in the Mediterranean overran Minorca for thousands of years. So what we are, I guess we're pretty polyglot. My father was the first non full-blooded


Minorcan in the family. His mother was English. My mother was English and my wife is of English ancestry. So we've pretty well washed it out at this point.\textsuperscript{42}

Frank Usina’s observation illuminates the substantial degree of Minorcan acculturation into the culture of northeast Florida. Frank’s cousin Michael Usina remembers the hermetic nature of Minorcans in the early 1900s:

I can tell you something about Minorcans, they were very close knit...they didn't share their stuff with anybody. Even the fishermen would be in the river, be in the creek fishing, and another boat starts coming, and if they were catching fish they'd pull up their anchor and leave. \textit{[Laughs]} They didn't want anybody to know where their fishing holes were. And that's just the way I think...that they grew up, they had to survive. They had to be, band together to survive. And that carried on through the years I think. You would not get Datil pepper seeds...forty years ago, forget it. You wouldn't. If you weren't a Minorcan you wouldn't get your hands on Datil pepper seeds.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{42} Frank Usina, interview with the author, 26 July 2013.

\textsuperscript{43} Michael Usina, interview with the author, 18 July 2013.
CHAPTER THREE

For many in Florida’s Minorcan community, sustaining the myth of the Datil pepper’s arrival from Minorca intact is essential. Myths, according to regionalist scholar Robert Dorman, “are not ‘fairy tales,’ make-believe constructs debunked by ‘true’ life. They are instead ordered, value-laden symbols and narratives, communally shared and transmitted, that interpret an irrational world and provide guideposts for action within it.”

Indeed, the very essence of group identity depends on the functionality and circulation of, among other components, myths. According to Palmer, group loyalty and identity necessitates “a willed adherence to the rules of the group [italics original]” by the group members. A level of faith and acceptance of a group’s core values and beliefs are “what make a people a nation, what endows them with a national identity. They are the ideals embodied in the national symbols, ceremonies and customs of a nation.” The community’s component “symbols, ceremonies and customs” contain, transmit and reify collective group identification.

Collective agreement on cultural signifiers gives rise to what C. Paige Gutierrez articulates in *Cajun Foodways* as “ethnic symbols.” Through an examination of the role of crawfish in Cajun culture, Gutierrez notes that designating culturally pertinent foodstuffs “ethnic emblems” is a productive way of examining the meaning of food as symbols for certain groups.

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Over time, through continued use and with public consumption, these items become repositories for a multiplicity of meanings, or “multivocalic” symbols.¹

In the context of cultural tourism, ethnic emblems like crawfish and Datil peppers are convenient cultural artifacts for tourists to consume. The Datil’s multivocality communicates a shared cultural past, a representation of environmental vigor, biological distinction, and an outlet for a unique cuisine. Through festivals, restaurants, and purchasable goods, tourists to St. Augustine are proffered a taste of one of the city’s influential cultures.

The intercultural interaction that accompanies heritage tourism—tourists’ encounter with St. Augustine culture and vice versa—offers an opportunity to analyze the Datil pepper’s symbolic construction and negotiation. Such multivocal ethnic emblems contain messages and directions for the host community, though these are invariably altered with tourist exposure. Culture displayed through descriptions, symbols, myths, and ceremonies, “have an impact on how individuals within that nation conceive of their personal identity and, by the same token, how the nation and its people are perceived by others.”² Thus, tourists have a great deal of influence on how the pepper is perceived, how the meaning of the pepper is disseminated, and how value is assigned to it. Heritage tourism is multi-directional: tourists are influenced by the experience of a host culture, and locals are impacted by the visitors.

Moreover, the strong significance of the Datil pepper within St. Augustine and the Minorcan communities—the private sphere—allows it to flourish in heritage tourism—the public sphere. That tourism provides a platform through which to sell culture and disseminate heritage allows the Minorcans to lay claim to the Datil pepper.

¹ Ibid, 82.
² Palmer, 317.
Festivals

In *Ghost Dancing on the Cracker Circuit*, a cultural study of festivals across the South, Rodger Lyle Brown explores the selectively constructed history at the center of contemporary public performances. In attending festivals like Swine Time, Rattlesnake Roundup, Hillbilly Days and the DeSoto Celebration, Brown gleans insight into waning cultural traditions and collective identity across the region:

The sense of community on the cracker circuit...is a residual cultural formation, meaning...that it was formed in the past and is still active in the current cultural process, but has been superseded by a new dominant order...What has happened...is that on the cracker circuit the reality of the rural community has become increasingly scarce, and it has been replaced by the *idealization* of community—that is to say, the countryside has been colonized by an idealization of itself, just as the real structures that determined the past communities are being dismantled, shredded and scrapped.3

The past and present coexist in such festivals, giving rise to selective commemoration of romantically imagined histories. Brown’s analysis is especially relevant to St. Augustine, where festivals actively promote affable community narratives.

Collective Minorcan identity is evidenced by, and reinforced through, several events in St. Augustine and the surrounding areas. Festivals and public celebrations are often popular venues for introducing visitors to both Minorcan and St. Augustine culture, as well as valuable sites for communicating the distinctive symbolic value of Minorcan foodways. On a touristic level, these events extend a chance to experience one of St. Augustine’s influential populations—the Minorcans—through the food being offered. Events such as the St. Ambrose Fair and the Menorcan Heritage Day Celebration invoke the Datil pepper as a consumable cultural ambassador, where the Datil pepper becomes a metonymy for a unique ethnic identity.

Members of the St. Ambrose Catholic Church in Elkton, Florida are descendants of the original Minorcan settlers who fled from New Smyrna. Families in this area have been established for generations. Spring 2013 marked the 132nd annual St. Ambrose Spring Fair. The fairs are fundraisers for the church and feature food, music, tours, auctions, gifts and games, and is known among certain groups for Minorcan clam chowder. Indeed, the St. Augustine Record article “St. Ambrose Fair serves up famous chowder” cites a visitor from Moultrie, Georgia who says “he has been coming down for the fair for the past eight to 10 years just for the Minorcan clam chowder.” The chowder is made every year by parish member Mary Ellen Masters, “Queen of Chowder.” Masters estimates that she makes 130 gallons for each fair event and uses a plethora of Datil peppers:

You start with one pot and you expand. We started making it for the fair probably—well they used to have gopher stew for the fair and when they could no longer do that we wanted something that was really Minorcan-related. And I guess I’ve been doing it for about twenty-five years. And I started out making one fifteen-gallon pot just to see, you know, if the people like it. And so we’re up to eight of those huge big pots now. And that’s all the capacity we have...I mean every year I hold my breath that it’s going to turn out the same but they all come back for it. We usually sell it all out.

The Menorcan Heritage Day Celebration is sponsored by the Menorcan Cultural Society and takes place yearly in St. Augustine’s historic district. Carol Lopez Bradshaw, the current Society president, accounts for the festival:

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6 Ibid.


8 Mary Ellen Masters, interview with the author, 3 November 2012.
The Menorcan Society was founded in the early 1980s...to preserve the history and the culture of the Minorcans. It’s not a money-making organization. The only money...that passes through the organization is money for your dues, which is $12 a year, which we can't get everybody to pay that....We send out a newsletter when I get around to writing it. We have about 600 members, not as many here...as we do all throughout the state [of Florida] because as the people, the baby-boomers are growing up and the grandmothers are dying and that then they find out they’re Minorcans. So they write back to St. Augustine to find out...We finally dwindled down to where we do not have meetings anymore because we never could get a date where everyone could come. People didn’t want to come out at night. They don’t want to come on Saturdays. So instead we have, like four events a year. And our major event is the...Menorcan Heritage Celebration.⁹

The Menorcan Heritage Day Celebration on March 9, 2013 commemorated the 236th anniversary of the arrival of the Minorcans in St. Augustine. The celebration is, for all intents and purposes, a large family reunion. Handfuls of curious tourists wander in at times, though for the majority of the celebration Minorcan descendants populate the event. Posters filled with family trees, photographs and ancestry information are positioned throughout the grounds of the Llambias house, where the event is held.

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⁹ Carol Lopez Bradshaw, interview with the author, 17 July 2013.
Homemade Datil pepper products and portions of pilaus from area restaurants for purchase line tables across the grounds. Michael and Theresa Usina contribute homemade Datil pepper condiments to sell at the festival, which they make from family recipes:

We have a recipe that's—I know it's over two hundred years old that was passed down through the family that we make our hot sauce [from]. Most people will just...put in ketchup and the peppers and vinegar and the different ingredients they use, put it in a pot, bring it to a boil and bottle it. We cook ours for three hours. We simmer it for three hours before it's bottled...We use Datil peppers and bell peppers and onions and vinegar and sugar and you just mix it up with ketchup...I like to use Heinz if I can, or Hunt's good ketchup. And that's another thing, it's very thick. Some people make—they just take and I don't know, use tomatoes and it's kind of watery. But no, ours is good, good and thick and it's got that real good flavor, sitting there simmering like that.

Michael Usina also sells homegrown Datil pepper plants from fifty year old family seed stock. For the 2013 Menorcan Heritage Day, Michael brought and sold each of his 100 Datil pepper plants.

The Datil is celebrated as an agricultural boon at the annual Datil Pepper Festival and Home & Garden Show. Hosted by “your friends and neighbors who volunteer to promote the appreciation and enjoyment of the Datil Pepper,” the Festival features prizes, tastings and Datil pepper products for sale. There are also cook-offs and sauce contests in professional and amateur categories. Touted as a grassroots community endeavor, the level of perceived

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11 Michael Usina, interview with the author, 18 July 2013.

12 Ibid.

authenticity is affixed to the pepper’s distinct St. Augustine character: The Datil is offered as a
dynamic product, unique to the soils of St. Johns County.14

Festivals such as the St. Ambrose Catholic Church fair, Menorcan Heritage Day and the
Datil Pepper Festival hold specific clues as to how public memory subsumes certain historical
features. As Brown writes, “these sorts of festivals...do their cultural work by creating sites for
the symbolic display of community. They become places where the pieces of the celebratory
repertoire of emblems and icons and gestures are refashioned, re-presented to create some
version of the world.”15 Much of this depicted world is driven by the shaping forces of heritage
tourism.

Commercial Condiments

Visitors to St. Augustine’s historic district encounter numerous opportunities to purchase
representations of St. Augustine in the form of trinkets, clothing, books, foodstuffs, etc. Among
these are a variety of Datil pepper condiments from sundry producers, with names like “Dat’l
Do-It” and “Dat’s Nice.” St. Augustine’s many restaurants and cafés also offer the chance to taste
Minorcan history.

Probably one of the first large-scale commercial Datil pepper sauce endeavors began in
1931 with Charles F. Hopkins, Jr., Products Inc. According to a 1931 St. Augustine Record
article, the company’s $50,000 plant in downtown St. Augustine would rely on 8,000 Datil
pepper bushes for produce to make large quantities of Datil pepper sauce and Datil pepper
dressing. The undertaking was touted as state of the art:

15 Brown, 50.
The formula from which the two local products are made is known only to Mr. Hopkins, who personally superintends the blending of the materials in a spotlessly clean and thoroughly blinded laboratory, constructed solely for this purpose. Once the materials have been blended in proper form, the whole is transferred to the factory itself, where machinery does the rest, putting the pepper sauce in beautifully labeled 2-ounce bottles and the dressing in 3½-ounce bottles for shipment.16

Hopkins entrusts the care of his Datil peppers to Frank Genovar, who, according to Hopkins, “has been planting Datil pepper bushes with outstanding success for years and is well versed in their culture, having learned the product under his father, who in turn learned the peculiarities of the unique pepper from his father.”17 Despite Hopkins’ reliance on local knowledge and assurance of a promising market for his products in “leading hotel operators and chefs all over the country,” the Datil pepper sauce facility had closed by 1937.18

Widespread recognition didn’t come to the Datil until Chris Way, a St. Augustine restaurant owner, started his Dat’l Do-It brand. Way began developing Datil relishes, mustards, jellies and vinegars in 1981 when bottles of his house hot sauces began disappearing from his restaurant tables:

Well when I opened up Barnacle Bill’s in 1981, I made a Datil pepper hot sauce, which was pretty common among the locals here in St. Augustine. Now the Datil pepper is not very well known outside of here, but for, you know, the last couple hundred years the locals here have—have kind of made it a—a tradition. But I started making a Datil pepper sauce to serve on my tables at Barnacle Bill’s when I started it in 1981. And after about four or five months of being open I noticed that the bottles of hot sauce were being stolen off the table. It didn’t have a label; it you know it was just a sauce that I created to serve with fried shrimp. And then the bottle started disappearing and it just kind of gave me the idea of well, you know, maybe if given the opportunity to buy it they might not steal it.19

17 Ibid.
18 According to notes from David Nolan, St. Augustine historian.
19 Chris Way, interview with the author, 19 July 2013.
The demand for commercial Datil pepper production grew with Dat’l Do-It’s success. Way remembers sourcing peppers during the initial stages: “At the time, you know, finding Datil peppers was tricky. I mean everybody might have a plant or two, but...when I started needing...hundreds of pounds of Datil peppers with no market to go and get them...there [was] nobody growing them commercial[ly]. There hadn't been a demand for them. So I kind of created the demand.”

Datil Do-It’s popularity is largely attributed to the auspicious timing of his venture. According to a *St. Augustine Record* article, Way “tapped into the pepper revival that began sweeping the nation in the late 1980s, as Americans searched for a flavor alternative to salt and dabbled in ethnic cuisines, carving out a niche for Southern peppers in the process.”

The company “‘took off’...when a gift set was designed for QVC, a shopping network on cable. ‘We sold out in less than two minutes,’ Way recalls of the [7,000] gift baskets he’d allotted to

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20 Ibid.

QVC.”22 From there, Dat’l Do-it blossomed: products are found in Walmart, T.J. Maxx, Target, among others. The company’s sales for 2002 were recorded close to $4 million.23 Way’s Datil products have shipped to markets as far away as Japan.24

In developing a Dat’l Do-It brand, Way notes that, “I was trying to come up with as many things as I could that—that would make the Datil pepper unique or stand out.” Way speaks to the role of the Datil pepper’s mythology in marketing a specialty hot sauce:

What research I could find on it was in all likelihood that the Datil pepper made its way here through Central America and the traders and stuff that were coming...through the Caribbean and into Florida would bring these...peppers with them. And then over...hundreds of years of growing in a particular environment, and I don’t know much on the scientific side, nor do I claim to, but it kind of developed its own characteristics...the other rumor or the other legend was that it wouldn’t grow anywhere else. It was the soil in St. Augustine and—and that’s all just hooey...I would never [say that the legends are false] publicly as far as marketing. I would say, ‘yeah, it’s the only place in the whole world it’ll grow. It can't grow anywhere [else] and it doesn’t taste right if it doesn’t grow here.’ So if you can create that kind of a—a buzz and legend it’s—it would be a good thing.25

Today, many smaller companies populate the tourism market with Datil pepper condiments. Among them is Marcia McQuaig, proprietor of Minorcan Datil Pepper Products, a company that produces a line of condiments featuring the Datil pepper such as Datil mayonnaise, mustard, marinade, jellies, and a popular ketchup-based Datil sauce. McQuaig’s company actively engages the Datil pepper origin story, identifying itself as an important voice supporting Minorcan culture and their claim on the Datil.

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22 Heymen, Anne. “Causey spicing up sales at Dat’l Do-it,” St. Augustine Record, August 17, 2002.

23 Ibid.


McQuaig first tasted a Datil in 1976, at the table of her Minorcan in-laws. McQuaig says, “we really ate a lot at my mother-in-law's house, she’s my mother-in-law now, but I remember seeing that because we had the pilau...and we use this now everyday. I mean I use it pretty much in a lot—the majority of what we do at home now.”26

Branded as “the Cuisine of Old St. Augustine,” Minorcan Datil Pepper Products began in 1992 after friends and family urged McQuaig to grow her homemade Christmas gift condiments into a business. Today the majority of her products are sold locally at sites including the St. Augustine Lighthouse, the Winery, Kyle’s Seafood and Curry Brothers’ Market, among others, though McQuaig notes that she’s shipped good as far away as Idaho, California and Canada. Minorcan Datil Pepper Products also supplies Datil sauces to a variety of St. Augustine restaurants under a private label option.

While McQuaig claims no ancestral Minorcan heritage, her use of “Minorcan” in product labeling and publicity material links the condiments with this ethnic group and locates the company’s recipes in the knowledge of generations of Minorcan cooks from her husband’s family. McQuaig remembers,

Mamma [her husband’s mother] always had some plants by the kitchen, just like the old, local Minorcan people have. If you go in their backyards you'll see five-gallon buckets with a few plants, you know. It's like everybody's local grows [Datil peppers]. Yes, they do want to grow their own Datils and then make their own sauces or incorporate them because there's a ton of people that make their sauce here in town.27

Minorcan Datil Pepper Products markets the story of the Datil’s mythical travels with the Minorcan indentured workers to Florida. McQuaig’s position as a businesswomen affords her the

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26 Marcia McQuaig, interview with the author, 23 July 2013.
27 Ibid.
opportunity to advocate for the Minorcan claim on the Datil pepper and capitalize on the myth.

When consumers ask about the relevance and history of the Datil pepper, she replies,

> that, to my knowledge, that it was brought here in the 1700s. And it was by Minorcans. I let them know about how they were indentured servants and they were down on the Turnbull Creek and they came up this way. And then also that, then they want to know well, where's Minorca? Well the Isle of Minorca is off the coast of Spain. And that's the legend that I have always heard. But I let them know that that's what I've heard. You know, there are other stories that it's come through Cuba and down the coast, and could be. But I kind of like that, that's kind of romancing the pepper, you know? I kind of like that. Regardless, it's here. And I do know that it was with the Minorcans because they—I really truly believe that because they still use it and then you get all this history and people can date back through their families with the pepper. And cooking with it and using it.  

The Minorcan lore is a valuable, alluring advertisement. Consumers not only purchase a hot sauce, but an embodiment of historical struggle and perseverance. For McQuaig, the pepper’s symbolism is lucrative: “My husband likes to say, and we'll probably use this tag line, you know, we're not just another hot sauce, we're 400 years of history.”

The choice to market the myth and “400 years of history” in the service of selling condiments is not only a technique for asserting the myth to appeal to customers. Marketing history is also a powerful means of disseminating the lore: the numbers and range of consumers of her product ensure that, in her words, the “romantic” history of the Datil pepper is perpetuated to both St. Augustine locals and tourists.

**Cookbooks**

Cookbooks document regional specialties, illuminate how subcultures adapted and assimilated to a New World dominant culture, and communicate how this assimilation is memorialized, reconstructed and remembered. For St. Augustine’s Minorcans, such cookbooks

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28 Marcia McQuaig, interview with the author, 23 July 2013.
publicize the private, proffering the tourist a glimpses into the distilled, constructed and authenticated lives of St. Augustine’s Minorcans.

_Menorcan Family Favorites_, a cookbook published by the Menorcan Cultural Society, strives to maintain a continuity with a perceived ancestral culture. A clear connection is made between the Minorcan population and contemporary Menorcans in the Balearic Sea: the booklet contains recipes submitted by St. Augustine’s Minorcan population, Menorcans of the Balearic Sea, as well as residents of Spain’s mainland. The authors write that, “the recipes you find in this collection are from the families who not only still live in Florida but through out [sic] the United States as well as Spain and Menorca.”29 Including recipes from a wide geographical region under the cover of one ethnic cookbook affirms the complexity of identity and the various working parts involved in constructing identity.

_Menorcan Family Favorites_ communicates the importance of maintaining cultural and familial connection to the recipes. Each recipe is carefully attributed to an individual and/or family, and is often followed by a short comment or story linking the recipe to a holiday or special occasion. Many are tributes to the influential cooks who raised and taught preceding generations of Minorcans, as this recipe for “Nana Donax’s Chowder: Coquina Clam Chowder” submitted by Cathy Coleman, Sabate, Manucy and Hernandez family, shows:

My Uncle Ralph (Ralph Sabate Hernandez) married Roselle brown [sic]. Uncle Ralph was born in Ferna[n]dina, FL and Aunt Roselle (Nana) was born in Loretta, FL. I don’t know if Nana was passed this recipe from her family, a friend, or if it was her own. Nana passed this recipe to my father. Our family prepares it every summer when we vacation on St. George island. Nana also made great saffron rice chicken, using the saffron my grandfather used to grow.

29 The Menorcan Cultural Society, _Menorcan Family Favorites_, publisher, location and date unknown. 1.
Orienting the reader/cook in a family lineage presents this recipe nostalgically authentic, linking Minorcan cuisine to unbroken tradition.

*Menorcan Family Favorites* conveys the importance of cookbooks to document and preserve otherwise ephemeral recipes. Janelle Pomar Whaley’s recipe for “Pork Pie” is a cautionary tale for unrecorded family recipes:

My mother, Beulah (Mrs. Joseph Pomar, Sr.) always baked this pie for the Christmas holidays. Needless to say, like most old-fashioned good [emphasis in the original] cooks, there was no recipe written out. When she died, I had to “trial and error” to be able to reconstruct the ingredients so I could bake the pie for my Dad at Christmas. He says it tastes the same!

These recipes help Minorcan families maintain cultural continuity by chronicling remembered cuisine of generations past. For curious non-Minorcan cooks, these collections of recipes serve as an historical record accessible through the act of cooking, as well as an exotic culinary experience of a unique ethnic other.

*Menorcan Family Favorites* emphasizes datil peppers, and a recipe preface provides the reader with a primer on the datil pepper:

The origin of these peppers is not really known. Many say the seeds were brought by the Menorcan women to St. Augustine, yet these peppers are not known on the island of Menorca today.

Old Menorcan recipes, as well as new ones, are greatly influenced by this hot and flavorful mighty midget.

What lacks in size is made up in it’s strength—tiny, green or yellow waxy, ATOMIC.

They may be used fresh or preserved by putting whole into bottles and covering them with vinegar. They can also be frozen. The more they age, the Hotter they get.

Sauces, jelly, relish are made with the datil pepper. These enhance the flavor of pilau, shrimp, oysters and clams.  

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30 Ibid, 23.
31 Ibid, 2.
This inclusion of this passage is warranted: fifteen of the cookbook’s total sixty-six recipes include, to some degree, Datil pepper. Many of these feature the pepper, such as those for Datil jellies, relishes, vinegar, and “Bottled Hell Datil Pepper Sauce (Red).”32 Others use Datils to a more subtle extent.

Privileging the Datil pepper over other ingredients speaks volumes. For one, the emphasis may be interpreted as an aggressive means of claiming the pepper as Minorcan cultural property. Indeed, the very act of publishing a cookbook establishes and solidifies one version of a cultural narrative. In this case, doing so enables the author(s) and the Minorcan community to lay claim to the Datil pepper as a central and key component of Minorcan heritage. Locating the pepper in community memory and linking it to Minorcan identity establishes it as something wholly Minorcan and of Minorcans. This could be valuable for members of the community looking to capitalize on Datil pepper products.

Additionally, stressing the role of the Datil imbues it with a particular weight and representative power. The Datil pepper’s presence in antiquated recipes casts it as a culinary relic and symbol of a past time. This is evident in recipes such as “Gopher Stew,” of which two versions are listed in *Menorcan Family Favorites*.33 Though Minorcans no longer eat the stew, family recipes are lovingly included as a significant record of times past. Considered thusly, the datil proves to be a symbol of perseverance. For while recipes may wane, cultural ingredients persist, proving to be tenacious and versatile—the very qualities attributed to Minorcans in their

32 Ibid, 6.
33 Ibid, 38.
heritage narratives. The Datil represents the past, yes, but it also symbolizes determination, continuity and adaptability.

*Menorcan Family Favorites* is not alone in its attachment to the infamous origin story. Numerous Florida-themed cookbooks are quick to attribute the Datil pepper to the Minorcans. The *St. Augustine Cookbook*, published by the City of St. Augustine, has this to say about the Datil pepper’s place in the Oldest City’s cuisine: “A number of St. Augustine recipes call for Datil pepper. It is a small yellow-green waxy pepper. [sic] sometimes flecked with red. Seeds of our datil pepper were brought by Minorcan women to St. Augustine in 1777. What it lacks in size it makes up in strength.”

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CONCLUSION

Heritage tourism has helped the Datil pepper move from a private symbol into a public symbol. Market demand has transformed a once ethnically specific pepper into a nationally-marketable commodity. Michael Usina’s recollection of the historically separate Minorcan community emphasizes the significance of this shift:

I guess it's just something the Minorcans in St. Augustine have done ever since they've been here. At one time, Minorcans were very jealous of their seeds. Datil pepper seeds. For instance, forty, fifty years ago, if you weren't a Minorcan, you wouldn't get your hands on Datil pepper seeds. There was no commercial application at all. People—Minorcans would have Datil peppers in their yard and that was it. They shared with one another, but you couldn't buy them. You couldn't go in any store or any kind of market of any kind and buy Datil peppers, that's for sure.¹

Now, however, the market is flooded with companies selling Datil pepper products and seeds. Michael Usina continues,

It really started picking up in the '80s and '90s, when the market really started. You had trouble getting rid of them back in the early years when I first started growing them. It seemed like the only people interested were fellow Minorcans and they grew their owns. Minorcans have kind of a history of being cheapskates so you couldn't get much for them [laughs]. You know, they wouldn't want to give you much or they'd want to trade you something. But anyways, the market has really opened...Ebay's full of them...I myself have sold a lot of seeds. I've kind of got out of that. But I've sold seeds all over the world. I've sold seeds to Japan, Cambodia, all over the United States, goodness...Australia, New Zealand. And when you sell them on Ebay you're open to the world market...I've got some really good prices. I've got as much as twenty dollars for thirty seeds.²

¹ Michael Usina, interview with the author, 18 July 2013.
² Ibid.
Yet given the variety of business plans and endeavors aiming to employ and promote the Datil as an internationally relevant consumer product, the pepper has experienced cyclical popularity and anonymity with no long-lasting effect. The Datil is not a household name in the way Tabasco, Texas Pete, and Louisiana hot sauces have proved to be. St. Augustine locals like Marcia McQuaig, for all of her efforts to substantiate and merchandise the Datil pepper, remains perplexed at the pepper’s inability to emerge as a mainstream condiment:

I don't have a clue [why the Datil is not more commonly known]. It's beyond me, it really is. You know my husband will say—Steven's biggest fear is he—and I hope that's a problem we have to cross one day, but he said, 'you don't want it to get like that [where the demand for the pepper exceeds the supply] because you can't produce enough peppers.' But I think it's all supply and demand. I think if the demand is there, then you'll have more farmers and other ones growing them. Truthfully, I really do. That would be a nice problem to have, in my book.¹

Slowly, however, the significance of the Datil pepper within the forces of heritage tourism is being realized. On September 13, 2013, a group of Datil pepper enthusiasts, scientists and businessmen gathered before the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners. Along with other proclamations implementing “Child Passenger Safety Week” and “National Estuaries Day,” the Board dubbed the Datil pepper as the official plant for St. Johns County and declared the first Saturday in October “Datil Pepper Day.”

These proclamations mark a significant moment in the Datil pepper’s cultural evolution by legally acknowledging the role of tourism interests in leveraging cultural symbolism. The significance of the proclamations hinges on a governmental interest in shaping and publicizing both community memory and collective regional history. For while the origin story is still widely debated and disputed, the tourism market authoritatively supports and celebrates the Minorcan

¹ Marcia McQuaig, interview with the author, 23 July 2013.
legend. Indeed, the proclamation instituting Datil Pepper Day qualifies the declaration with the generations-old lore:

WHEREAS, according to Minorcan legend, their ancestors brought the first seeds of Datil to St. Johns County in 1777 and for hundreds of years, Minorcan descendants have integrated the Datil Pepper into the heritage and culture of St. Johns County, and,
WHEREAS, Datil peppers, whether produced in small, back-yard, family gardens or large agricultural crops, are renowned throughout St. Johns County and can be found in hundreds of Datil Pepper products, local recipes, restaurants, and merchants...
NOW THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED, by the Board of County Commissioners of St. Johns County, Florida, that the first Saturday in October henceforth be celebrated as Datil Pepper Day
PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Board of County Commissioners of St. Johns County, Florida this 17th day of September 2013. 2

The county government’s participation in disseminating the Datil’s mythology reflects one way in which St. Augustine and St. Johns County heritage tourism is shifting and evolving. No longer is an encounter with the Datil pepper limited to locals’ kitchens and the city’s tourists: producers are extending the market to locales outside of the Oldest City.

St. Augustine producers have long claimed the Datil pepper as a Minorcan and St. Augustine product, revealing how a specific population becomes inscribed onto a tangible foodstuff. But what are the implications for this increase in Datil pepper commerce? What are the new companies and projects utilizing the Datil? What remains to be seen is how the symbolism shifts with each new endeavor.

Currently, Firehouse Subs is the biggest contender in the Datil’s future. To date, the Jacksonville, Florida-based restaurant chain utilizes the largest quantity of Datils in the world, producing some 30,000 gallons of their Captain Sorensen’s Datil Pepper Hot Sauce each year. With substantial volumes of Datil pepper sauce in restaurant locations across the country, Firehouse Subs positions itself as a major influence for how the St. Augustine’s pepper—and its accompanying history—is perceived. In an episode of “Flavors of America,” a series of promotional videos for Firehouse Subs, co-founder Chris Sorensen offers this history of the Datil pepper:

Let me tell you about where the history of the Datil pepper really started. Off the coast of these waters here, the Spanish explorers brought the Datil pepper from South America and the Caribbean to this area, where they’ve been growing since the 1700s. And they still are today, by many locals.³

As Chris speaks, the video features an animated Conquistador, carrying an oversized Datil pepper, sailing towards the coast aboard a ship, “La Datil.” The conquistador tosses the pepper at a Native American looking on, knocking the Indian on the head with the pepper.⁴

The video’s conflation of “Spanish explorers” with Minorcans and connection of the Datil pepper to South America complicates the prevailing origin story and myth so valuable for

⁴ Ibid.
heritage tourism. The implications of this video, coupled with Firehouse Subs’ reach, are a Datil stripped of generations-old lore and ethnic relevance. If the “Flavors of America” video is an indicator, a Firehouse Subs facilitation of the Datil pepper to national prominence will be with omission of the Minorcan origin story.

The Datil pepper is one ethnic emblem among a landscape of cultural signifiers upon which St. Augustine, Florida is built. As a regional specialty with an expanding market, the pepper gains purchase in a heritage tourism context given its potent symbolism and rich historical association. Currently, the Datil pepper offers the St. Augustine and Minorcan communities an opportunity to capitalize on history through the reiteration and dissemination of a cultural narrative. However, the shifting producer and consumer base will invariably influence the meaning and significance of the Datil pepper.

This heritage tourism case study is couched in a body of literature examining how history, heritage and memory may be constructed and remade. As such, I explore how subcultures capitalize on origin myths, and how, in the absence of a delineated historical account and
documentation, myths conceived in a heritage tourism context come to be supremely accepted and perpetuated. Yet as non-static entities, these myths are subject to change with reliance on different hosts.

This project gives rise to numerous avenues for future research. Namely, the relationship between the Datil pepper and the lore of other touristic icons in St. Augustine; a comparative cross-cultural study of the evolution of the cuisines of Minorca and St. Augustine; an application of critical race theory to the Minorcan and African American communities of St. Johns County from the 1800s through today; a regionalist exploration of intersecting Southern, Floridian, and Minorcan identities.


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Benét, William Rose. The Dust Which is God. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1941.


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Griffin, Patricia, interview with the author, 23 November 2012.


Heymen, Anne. “Causey spicing up sales at Dat’l Do-it,” St. Augustine Record, August 17, 2002.


Masters, Mary Ellen, interview with the author, 3 November 2012.


McQuaig, Marcia, interview with the author, 23 July 2013.

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Usina, Frank, interview with the author, 26 July 2013.

Usina, Michael, interview with the author, 18 July 2013.


Way, Chris, interview with the author, 19 July 2013.


VITA

Education

Master of Arts, Southern Studies, pending May 2013 — University of Mississippi (Oxford, MS)
- Nathalie Dupree Graduate Fellow; William Winter Scholar; Documentary thesis: “‘Bottling Hell’: Myth-making, Cultural Identity and the Datil Pepper of St. Augustine, FL.”

Bachelor of Arts, Humanities, May 2010 — New College of Florida (Sarasota, FL)
- 4.0 GPA; Undergraduate thesis: “Play it by Ear: Towards a Definition of Audio Documentary.”

Study Abroad
- Semester at Sea, University of Virginia (Spring 2008): Semester-long experiential global studies program. Itinerary stops included Puerto Rico, South Africa, Mauritius, India, Hong Kong, Japan, among others.
- Salt Institute for Documentary Studies, Radio Program (Fall 2007): Intensive semester-long documentary training program in Portland, ME; produced two feature-length radio documentaries.

Teaching Experience

Teaching Assistant, New College of Florida; Sarasota, FL — January interterm 2010
Assisted with “Radio Documentary and Audioethnography”; story construction, editing, interviewing techniques.

Work Experience

Graduate Assistant, Southern Foodways Alliance; University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS — Fall 2012 - Present
OKRACAST podcast producer; assist with annual symposium; blog contributor; researcher, oral history contributor and curator.

Researcher and Documentarian, Center for the Study of Southern Culture; University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS — Summer 2013
Part of a team conducting oral history interviews and archival research. Work will culminate in 2014 in a project sponsored by the University of Mississippi’s Southern Foodways Alliance and Media and Documentary Projects. Our research investigates the complex consequences of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 for Jackson.

U.S. Student Fulbright Researcher, U.S. State Department; Republic of Mauritius — 2010-2011
Immersive anthropology/journalism research on the Mauritian press; oral history work with social activists.

Grants, Scholarships and Awards

Masters
- Graduate Student Research Grant — Summer 2013
- Tuition Waver and Academic Assistantship — August 2012 - May 2014

Undergraduate
- U.S. Student Fulbright Grant — September 2010 - June 2011
- Florida Medallion Bright Futures Scholarship — August 2005 - May 2010
- New College of Florida Scholarship — August 2005 - May 2009
- Institute for Shipboard Education Financial Aid Award — Spring 2008