

Virginia Hospitality

Virginia has been noted for hospitality since early colonial days. Plantations were far apart and there were few taverns or ordinaries. Worthy travelers were welcomed to the homes of planters and gentlemen to visit and enjoy the hosts' generosity. Most of Virginia society were either related or had a common political, social or religious connection. Rather than the six degrees of separation typical of modern encounters, there was normally only one or two. A stranger with a modicum of social skills, could sail into Virginia, make a few select acquaintances, and then travel the state staying in the best homes and partaking of the best food, drink and companionship. After King Charles I lost his head, many expatriate Cavaliers found refuge and hospitality in Virginia. In 1649, Colonel Henry Norwood wrote of his reception in York County: "It fell out at that time that Captain Wormeley (of His Majesty's Council) had guests in his house . . . feasting and carousing, that were lately come from England, and most of them my intimate acquaintance . . . Using the common freedom of the country, I thrust myself amongst Captain Wormeley's guests in crossing the creek and had a kind reception from them all, which answered (if not exceeded) my expectations." Wormeley soon moved his quarters to Rosegill in (now) Middlesex County, where his son, Ralph II, continued the established traditions. The French Huguenot, Durand, chronicled some of the goings-on at Rosegill, which included all-night card games and prodigious quantities of wine, cider and beer. Durand found the wine so strong that he diluted his with water and remarked that the Governor (Lord Howard of Effingham) and Wormeley laughed at him as they took theirs straight and still managed to keep an even keel.

Traditions of Virginia hospitality changed little over the next two hundred and fifty years. Out of necessity and custom, people were prepared to entertain visitors at any time and without notice. My father was raised in the Northern Neck at the end of the horse and buggy era. When his mother got the notion to go "callin", she would hitch Old May to the buggy and set off down the road, such as it was. Short trips meant dinner (the large noon meal in those days), a few hours to

visit, and the trip home before dark. On longer trips, she was expected to spend the night; and had little choice. Growing up on the farm, our family was always prepared to receive guests. All meals were hot and home cooked. There was no problem to set another place or two. Feed salesmen, for example, knew that they needed to make their business call around 10:00 to be invited to lunch. By the 1960's, the rules had changed a little bit. Even if one visited a friend or relative close to a meal or was in the position to spend the night, there were civil conventions to be observed. The potential host was required to extend an invitation to just about anyone. The potential guest was required to decline the first offer. The second offer was not obligatory and indicated that the host would graciously tolerate the intrusion, should you be crude enough to accept at that point. The third offer indicated that the host was serious and may even enjoy the company. The guest was then obligated to accept unless there was a good reason not to. Even relatives, however, were expected to observe the three-day rule, regardless of how insistent the host may be.

Afternoon social visits were commonplace. Friends dropped by frequently for cocktails and invariably were invited to dinner. Appetizers were always on hand or could be prepared quickly. At "Something Different", we try to make spontaneous entertaining easy. We have a nice selection of fine wines and cheeses, both domestic and imported. We make several unique spreads to serve on crackers: THE Virginia Sandwich spread (smoked turkey and country ham salad), a duxelle spread (mushrooms, onions and garlic with everything cooked out but the flavor), and our olive salad spread. Other spreads and dressings can be made to order, including low-fat versions with homemade fat free cottage cheese or our decadent Roquefort dressing or dip made with homemade mayonnaise. Our herbed and peppered smoked salmon with Norwegian dill sauce is always popular as are many of our smoked meats, such as the Texas-style beef brisket with a horseradish and Dijon mustard dip. Be prepared for expected or unexpected guests - Stop by for "Something Different"!

