

THE Virginia Sandwich

By Dan Gill, Ethno-Gastronomist



Smoked Turkey and Country Ham
Sandwich spread and appetizer

Published in AMERICAN SANDWICH
by Becky Mercuri

In 2002, WQED in Pittsburgh aired a PBS special and offered a companion cookbook and sandwich history entitled "Sandwiches That You Will Like". The show and book featured famous sandwiches from around the country. Like it or not, the pedestrian sandwich dominates informal American cuisine: it is quick and easy to make (and eat), portable and delicious: it is often a meal in one package for folks in the fast lane. We Americans eat more than 45 billion sandwiches per year or almost 200 per person.

Sandwiches are not only popular; they are also personal and deeply ingrained in regional culture; reflecting the diversity in tastes and ethnic backgrounds across the country. The program was an instant success and Gibbs Smith, Publishers, decided to go national with a cookbook featuring one signature sandwich and eatery from each state. Becky Mercuri, a travel and food author from New York who had written the PBS program's companion book, was asked to write American Sandwich. Many state sandwiches were obvious candidates: The Reuben from New York, the Philly Cheese Steak from Pennsylvania and the Muffaletta from Louisiana. Virginia is not noted for a specific sandwich, but the state is well known for country-cured hams, so Becky went in search of a sandwich featuring country ham and typical of Virginia culture. In searching the Internet for information, she came across a web page that I had written a few years earlier describing how to cure hams the old way and what to do with them. Intrigued she then roamed around our site until she found the "Something Different Country Store and Deli" pages featuring custom sandwiches made to order. She also recalled that she had seen some of my posts on food culture and barbecue forums and realized that we had mutual friends - so I had some credibility to start with. She e-mailed me right away and asked if I had a signature sandwich representative of Virginia and incorporating country ham. "Of course we do", I replied. "Give me a minute".

We already had a very good smoked turkey salad, so I asked one of the girls working for us to make a batch and include finely chopped country ham. She was also required to measure, at least this once. Turkey and country ham are complementary; I often put a few slices of country ham on a traditional turkey sandwich; white bread, mayonnaise, thinly sliced turkey, salt and pepper and lettuce and that's all (not only was I raised on a turkey farm, but I actually have an advanced degree in turkey science - really - so I know how to make a turkey sandwich!). The result was a winner on the first try and the recipe was sent off to Becky for testing.

She and her neighbors (testers) loved it, and we were "in". The book was published in October 2004 for national distribution. When new customers visit "Something Different", they are shown the book and offered a taste of our signature spread. This frequently results in the sale of the sandwich, the book, or a take-home container - or all three! Sometimes, our otherwise conscientious staff gets busy or forgets who's been in. So if you don't get the offer, just ask! While it makes a great sandwich, our Smoked Turkey and Country Ham combination is even more popular as an hors d'oeuvre to spread on crackers.

It is difficult to believe that I actually created something original, especially in such a crowded field as cookery, but I looked in all of the vintage cookbooks and found nothing close. Therefore, pending evidence to the contrary, I hereby plant my flag firmly in the "Jello" of culinary history and lay claim to THE Virginia Sandwich!

Smoked Turkey and Country Ham Sandwich Spread

1½ pounds (3 cups) chopped smoked turkey
1 pound (2 cups) finely chopped or ground cooked country ham
6 hard boiled eggs, peeled and chopped
½ cup finely diced onion
½ cup finely chopped celery
1/3 cup prepared yellow mustard
1 cup quality mayonnaise
½ cup sweet pickle relish
1 teaspoon granulated garlic
2 tablespoon dried parsley
1 ½ teaspoons Adobo, or to taste
1 ½ teaspoons ground black pepper, or to taste

In a large bowl, mix all ingredients together until well combined. Cover and refrigerate until ready to use. This is a delicious spread on a choice of bread or rolls topped with crispy lettuce served on crackers for an appetizer. Yield: About 8 sandwiches.

Serve on bread or toast with optional lettuce, tomato and mayonnaise.

Also popular served on crackers as an appetizer.

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