

neighborhoods, bringing their musical patter and goods to the front doors of white Charlestonians.

Flower girls, like the one shown on the opposite page, carried on a tradition that was dear to Charlestonians for many years. Through the streets, at Market Hall or near the Federal Courthouse at Broad and Meeting streets, flower ladies were always ready with the freshest picks of the season to brighten a home or dinner table. Today, like so many of the other hucksters, the flower ladies are no more.

At home in the morning, one might hear the approaching egg salesman working his way down the street calling:

“Enny Yad aigs terday my miss?”

Translation: “Do you wish any eggs hens have laid in my yard, miss?”

The ground-nut cake huckster plied her trade every day at the corner of St. Philip and George streets, near the College of Charleston. She sold ground-nut cakes, coconut cakes in chocolate, pink or white colors. She also sold benne seeds, a Charleston staple, and monkey meat. Monkey meat was neither monkey nor meat. Rather, it was a candy she made with coconut and molasses, a favorite with the children, who readily walked near her street corner.

The Charleston waterways were also important to the livelihood of many black families. The Mosquito Fleet was a prodigious fleet of small boats and dinghies used by island and city blacks to fish, rake for oysters, crab and troll. The hurricane of 1911 destroyed many of the small watercraft in Charleston. But that didn't stop fishing activity. If it could float and be navigated, black fishermen



∞ *Ground Nut Cake Vendor* ∞



Brush Vendor
∞



Milk Boy
∞

used it to pull bounty from the ocean, marshes and waterways to take to market in Charleston.

Charlestonians might hear a huckster simply calling out his catch, "Swimpy, swimpy" or "Ch'ice sha'k steaks." Sometimes the available catch would be called out in song, "Porgy walk, Porgy talk, Porgy eat with a knife and fork." This Porgy does not refer to the character in DuBose Heyward's famous book. Porgy is a saltwater fish, a prized variety of chub.

The vegetable and fruit hucksters were also a plentiful sight in town. Never failing to amaze onlookers, the hucksters could balance as much as a 50-lb. basket on their heads while calling out, "Red rose to-may-toes, green pease – sugar pease" or "Vegetubble, git yo vegetubble." The ability of the hucksters to balance a basket, yet move about as gracefully as a society debutante at a ball, was much admired.

In the 1930s, Harriette Kershaw Leiding spent time recording many of the street cadences sung by the hucksters. One favorite street vendor was the watermelon man and the strawberry man:

*Load my gun,
wid sweet sugar plum
an shoot den nung gal,
water- million.*

*Straw – BER – ry,
e fresh an e fine,
an e jus off de vine,
Straw – BER – ry.*

Leiding recorded a huckster named John, peddling peas needed for a signature Charleston rice dish:



Charleston Vegetable Vendors





Edie was a little colored girl who lived with her brother, Tom, and her mother in the servants' quarters of the house next door to us. . . . I thought Edie the most beautiful, sweetest and wonderful creature in the world. . . . At the age of fourteen, she died of consumption as they called it in those days. T.B. [tuberculosis] today. I'll always remember her as the most radiant, beautiful, gentle and loving person in the world. Dear little Edie! Whenever I think of angels, I think of her.

- ELMA JOHNSON GETTYS

My Friend
✂

The street hucksters and their cries were so popular in Charleston that a street criers contest was held each year during the city's annual spring Azalea Festival. The winning huckster one year sang out:

*Pop-eye mullet and greasy rice
Makes the po' man loss he wife
Lem a deddy de boun
Raw Shrimp*

Johnson, always priding himself on his dress and appearance, surely had frequent exchanges with the shoeshine boys on the street. On the back of one family picture, he noted with sadness the passing of one of these young men. The boy, it would seem, was homeless and slept at night at the Chisolm Mill on the Ashley River. One chilly night, he sought warmth in a shaft at the mill, nestling in the rice chaff for protection from the night air. During the course of the night, he suffocated in the chaff. He was found the next morning by one of his compatriots.

Often customers would engage in conversation with the hucksters and occasionally inquire about where they lived. They might respond, "Across from Jim Isle" (James Island); "From up de rood to 8 mile" (distance from one's home was often measured by the number of miles from the "center" of town at Broad and Meeting streets); or "ober de nu bridge" (traveling over the bridge built after the Civil War to West Ashley).

Johnson and his family delighted themselves with their trips to the country, sometimes to Otranto, Summerville or one of the islands. On one trip, Johnson encountered a jug band by the side of the road sitting on a downed tree. Armed with a large jug, a harmonica and a tambourine, this group was ready to entertain, knowing a tip might come their way. Johnson couldn't resist the moment and



Hulling Rice on the Cooper River



