

# The History of Chili Cook-Offs

## Part Three: The Sixties; Terlingua Cook-Off Grows



C.V. Woods Beam Bottle

After the 1967 Terlingua chili cook-off, when one of the three judges claimed to be poisoned and the other two judges each voted for a different winner, the contest was called a draw. (In case you missed [last month's installment](#) the contestants were Wick Fowler and H. Allen Smith.)

In 1968, the contest again failed to provide the world with a chili-cooking champion. That contest again featured Wick Fowler as the Texas representative and, when H. Allen Smith came down with a case of the shingles, Wino Woody DeSilva from California was called in as a substitute. After all the votes were in and the ballot box was being taken to the referee, a masked man with a rifle took the ballot box and threw it down one of the abandoned mine shafts that dot the area. Again, no winner.

I can find no record of De Silva's recipe, other than it contained sweet woodruff, an exotic herb. Wick Fowler stuck with his standard recipe.

### Terlingua Contest gets bigger

The 1969 cook-off saw an increase in the number of contestants at Terlingua. C.V. Woods Jr. from California and Arizona rode into town in a double-decker English bus with his entourage. Joseph DeFrates of Chilli Man Chilli from Illinois came in to represent the upper Midwest. Wino Woody De Silva was again on hand, as was Wick Fowler.

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It was reported by reliable sources that Wino Woody fell into his pot of chili, thereby decreasing his chances of winning.

When the smoke and fumes had cleared, C.V. Woods Jr. was the winner. Fowler claimed second place and Chilli Man DeFrates was third.

C.V. Woods Jr. was quite an interesting man. His chili roots trace back to Amarillo, Texas, thus no beans were to be found in his championship chili. "Woody," as he was known to his friends, was the man who bought London Bridge and moved it to Arizona. He was also the principal involved in building Disneyland. He was married to actress Joann Dru. Woody had the most exotic chili recipe ever followed at Terlingua. The California vegetable influence is evident. His use of chicken stock was way ahead of its time.

Here is his recipe:

### **C. V. Woods Jr. Winning Chili Recipe**

- 1 3-pound chicken
- 1-1/2 quarts water
- 1/2 pound beef suet
- 1/4 cup finely chopped celery
- 7 cups peeled, chopped tomatoes
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 5 pounds center cut pork chops, thin
- 4 pounds flank steak
- 3 medium onions, cut in 1/2-inch pieces
- 3 green peppers, cut in 3/8-inch pieces
- 1 pound Jack cheese, shredded
- 6 long green chiles
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- 1 tablespoon ground cumin

- 1/2 teaspoon MSG
- 1 tablespoon black pepper
- 4 teaspoons salt
- 5 tablespoons chili powder
- 1 teaspoon dried cilantro
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 cup beer
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- juice of 1 lime

Cut chicken into pieces and combine with water in large saucepan. Simmer 2 hours then strain off broth. (Find something else to do with the chicken.)

In a 2-quart saucepan, combine the celery, tomatoes and sugar and simmer *slowly* for 1-1/2 hours.

Boil the chiles 15 minutes until tender, remove seeds and cut in 1/4-inch squares.

Mix the oregano, cumin, MSG, pepper, salt, chili powder, cilantro and thyme with beer until all lumps are dissolved.

Add tomato mixture, chiles, beer mixture and garlic to the chicken broth.

Melt suet to make 6 to 8 tablespoons of drippings. Pour 1/3 of the suet drippings into a skillet. Add half of the pork chops, which have been trimmed of all fat and cut into 1/4-inch cubes, and brown. Repeat for remaining pork chops. Add pork to broth mixture and cook slowly 30 minutes.

Trim all fat from flank steak and cut into 3/8-inch cubes. Brown the flank steak in remaining drippings, about one-third at a time. Add to the pork mixture.

Return to simmer and cook slowly about 1 hour. Add onions and green peppers, simmer 2 to 3 hours longer, stirring with a wooden spoon every 15 to 20 minutes.

Cool for 1 hour, then refrigerate for 24 hours.

Reheat chili before serving. About 5 minutes before serving time, add the cheese. Just before serving, add the lime juice and stir with wooden spoon.

There we have one of the world's most famous chili recipes. Of course, it is impractical to refrigerate the chili overnight, so that step was omitted at Terlingua.

Woods commissioned a Jim Beam figural bottle with his likeness and the recipe on it. These have become desirable collectibles among chili devotees.

Wick Fowler finally got his due recognition in 1970, a year that also marked the first appearance of a female chili cook at Terlingua. Janice Constantine of Midland, Texas, came in to contest the men. The Terlingua contest had always been "men only" affairs. Janice struck a blow for women's rights early on. She was consigned to the sidelines of the cook-off area, and it is said she was arrested for "Being a woman while cooking chili". There is no record I can find of how she did in the competition.

Also in the Firsts department was the first Native American to enter the contest. Chief Fulton Battice of the Alabama-Coushatta nation in East Texas joined the fray.

Back for another try for the title was Joe "Chilli Man" DeFrates and one or two others who are lost to historical record.

Wick Fowler finally got his World Championship trophy. Second place went to Chief Battice and "Chilli Man" placed third.

### **Who got to play?**

After the first two two-man cook-offs, I'm really not sure how contestants were chosen or by who (or is that whom?). I think, in any case, some credentials were required. DeFrates was in the chilli business. C. V. Woods had enough money to play anywhere he wanted to.

The party got so popular that people who were not invited showed up, set up shop and cooked chili. I don't think these chilis were judged.

When I first got connected with the chili world in 1973, Frank Tolbert pretty much decided who cooked in Terlingua. When there was a cook-off that had a decent number of cooks and was getting some media attention, the winner could be invited to Terlingua, if Tolbert approved.

Tolbert told me that if I wanted to cook at Terlingua, I should cross either the Oklahoma or the Louisiana state line and set up and cook chili at the first roadside park or other convenient place and then declare myself the champion of that state and I would qualify.

Next month we will report on one or two more of the early cook-offs in part four, [Upheavals, Female Competitors and a Parting of the Ways](#). And then we will sometime in the future pull up some of the more famous recipes from Terlingua.