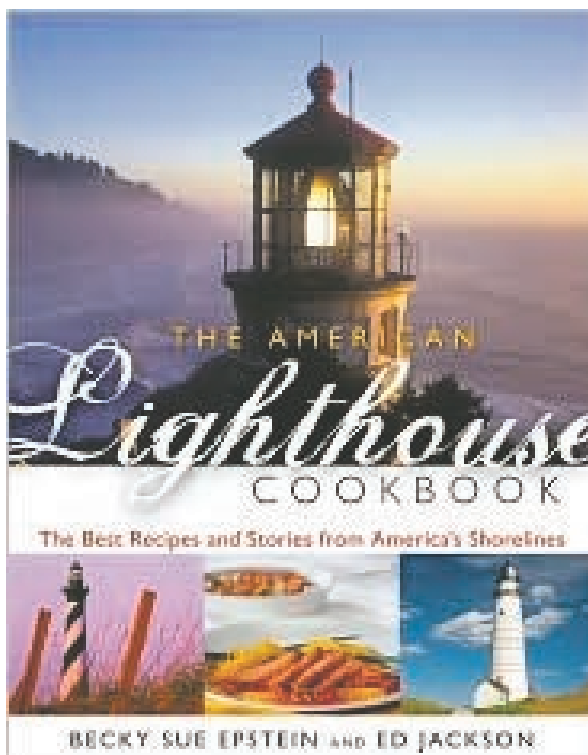


“Illuminating Our Coastlines, Inspiring Our Menus”: *Locals, Lighthouses and Locavores*



Ed Jackson & Becky Sue Epstein photographed by Pat Rabby at the Lexington Farmer's Market

By Mary Kantor

Lexington residents and co-authors Ed Jackson and Becky Sue Epstein have recently released *The American Lighthouse Cookbook: The Best Recipes and Stories from America's Shorelines*. The publisher's news release prompts food lovers to “embark on a culinary journey that blends coastal cuisine with lighthouse lore.” This journey through 300+ pages covers eight geographical regions and features the backgrounds and stories of forty-seven lighthouses. For each of these lighthouses a menu is provided, drawing from local foods available to lighthouse keepers from the 1700s through today. Some of the menus' recipes come from lighthouse societies, inns, and individuals; the rest have been developed by Ed Jackson. I offer the reader here an entry into *The American Lighthouse Cookbook* — and herald its arrival for all who love eating, cooking, and coastlines. (But first, I offer my own caveat as a writer. I am a religion scholar, and while I could perhaps write

expansively on the varied rituals associated with food, eating, and ecstatic spiritual experiences, I make no claims to be a credentialed food critic. Nor do I make claims to be a chef. Though with my recent attempt at renovations on the meager kitchen in my apartment, I am hopeful... and embrace the miraculous. And lest my ivy-league degrees in divinity go untapped for this article's writing, let me just say about this book's collection of recipes: *Deorum cibus est* — it is food for the gods...)

The Locals: Epstein and Jackson

At a Lexington coffeehouse, the site of the collaborative project's inception over two years ago, I had the opportunity to speak with chef Jackson and food writer Epstein about their cookbook. “We met through the Lexington Newcomers Club ten years ago. I was getting out of the club and Ed was coming into the club,” says Epstein. This local meeting prompted Jackson to contact Epstein years later with his book idea. The thinking behind the book began when Jackson

was a child: “I had the idea for a long time... I saw a show about a lighthouse keeper and his wife. He would gather food from the sea and she would get food from their garden. And they would come together and make dinner. I was finally able to put my two passions — lighthouses and food — together into this book. But before I even got to putting them into a book, I had to find a writer.” Showing Epstein his idea, he said: “What do you think? I need a partner.” Looking over his ideas, Epstein's response: “Let's write a book.”

Epstein is a lifestyle writer, specializing in food, wine and travel. Her first book, with Hilary Dole Klein, was *Substituting Ingredients: An A to Z Kitchen Reference*. (This book, currently being updated and redone, will be reissued from the same publisher in the next year.) The Senior Editor, Wine and Spirits, for the national lifestyle publications *Intermezzo Magazine*, Epstein has also written for many other trade and consumer publications including *Art & Antiques*, *Food & Wine*, *Wine Spectator*, *Yankee Magazine*, *The*

Tasting Panel, *Beverage Business*, *Sante Magazine* and *iwineradio*. Her food career began on the west coast as a restaurant reviewer for *The Los Angeles Times*. On the east coast, she has explored Cape Cod's seacoast foods and restaurants' signature recipes in her column “Tastes of the Cape” in *The Cape Cod Times'* monthly *Prime Time*. Having written from both coasts, Epstein now co-authors this new book featuring coastal cuisines from regions that circle the entire country.

With roots in the Great Lakes region, Jackson brings his own experience of coastal cuisines to the book. After having lived in various cities on and around Lake Michigan, and having owned his own graphic arts company in Chicago, he moved east to pursue his love of food. A graduate of New York's Culinary Institute of America, he has worked at Charlie Trotter's in Chicago, Bradley Ogden at Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas, and in Boston restaurants Clio Restaurant, Maison Robert, Tremont 647 and the Tuscan Grill. He now does private catering and cooking demonstrations at Williams Sonoma and other establishments. He is currently in production on a video cooking series called “Chef Ed Cooks.” Before the end of the year, LexMedia will also present a cooking show featuring the new cookbook.

Bringing together the food careers of Epstein and Jackson proves a fruitful pairing. *The American Lighthouse Cookbook*, released only a few months ago, has already been named the Winner in the “Cookbooks: Regional” category of The National “Best Books” 2009 Awards (NBBA) by USA Book News. com, the premiere online magazine and review website for mainstream and independent publishing houses. Publishers Weekly Web Exclusive called it “a state-of-the-nation snapshot, displaying all of the U.S.'s culinary peculiarities... Those with a connection to the lighthouses profiled will get the most out of the book, but even landlubbers

SCALLOPS DUSTED WITH WILD MUSHROOM POWDER

This combination of ingredients goes together beautifully. You cannot go wrong with this dish.

2 POUNDS SEA SCALLOPS, PREFERABLY U-10 (THIS MEANS 10 OR FEWER SCALLOPS PER POUND)
 2 TEASPOONS SALT
 ½ TEASPOON FRESHLY GROUND BLACK PEPPER
 ¼ CUP MUSHROOM POWDER (RECIPE FOLLOWS)
 2 TABLESPOONS VEGETABLE OIL
 4 TABLESPOONS BUTTER, DIVIDED
 1 TABLESPOON MINCED SHALLOTS
 2 TABLESPOONS WHITE WINE
 ¼ CUP CHICKEN STOCK

1. Season the scallops with salt and pepper. Dip both ends into the Mushroom Powder. Reserve remaining powder for sauce.
2. Heat a large sauté pan over medium heat. Add the oil, allow to heat up, and then add 2 tablespoons butter.
3. When the butter has melted and stopped foaming, put the scallops in pan and increase heat to medium-high. Do not overcrowd.
4. Sauté for 3 to 4 minutes per side. Remove the scallops from the pan, place on a plate, and cover to keep warm.
5. Drain and discard all but 2 tablespoons of oil from the pan. Turn heat to medium. Sauté the shallots for 2 to 3 minutes. Stir in remaining Mushroom Powder, white wine, and stock. Reduce by half. Stir in remaining butter, 1 teaspoon at a time.
6. Return scallops and any juices to the pan. Serve scallops and sauce immediately.

YIELD: 4–6 servings
 PREPARATION TIME: 5 minutes
 COOKING TIME: 8 minutes

Mushroom Powder

1½ OUNCES DRIED MUSHROOMS (SHIITAKES, MORELS, OR CEPES)

1. Preheat the oven to 200°F.
2. Break the mushrooms into small pieces and place on a baking sheet. Place in oven.
3. Bake for 45 to 60 minutes, checking every 15 minutes. Remove any pieces that may burn.
4. Remove and allow to cool. Place the mushrooms in spice grinder and grind to powder.
5. Pass powder through a sieve to remove large particles. The larger pieces can be saved to flavor soups and sauces.

YIELD: ½ cup
 PREPARATION TIME: 2 minutes
 COOKING TIME: 45–60 minutes

APPLE PUDDING CAKE

This recipe is from Apple Jack Orchards in Delano, MN. It's made with Honeycrisp apples, which were developed by the University of Minnesota especially for growing in this climate. Great with whipped cream.



1 CUP CHOPPED BLACK WALNUTS
 ¼ CUP VEGETABLE SHORTENING
 1½ CUPS SUGAR
 2 EGGS
 2 TEASPOONS BAKING SODA
 2 TEASPOONS CINNAMON
 1 TEASPOON NUTMEG
 2 CUPS ALL-PURPOSE FLOUR
 6 CUPS HONEY CRISP APPLES, PEELED, CORED AND CHOPPED
 APPLE PUDDING CAKE SAUCE (RECIPE FOLLOWS)
 1 CUP HEAVY WHIPPING CREAM, FOR SERVING (OPTIONAL)

1. Preheat the oven to 325°F. Grease a 13×9-inch pan.
2. Heat a frying pan over medium-low heat. Toast the walnuts until they begin to change color and become fragrant, about 7 minutes. Pour into a dish and set aside.
3. In the large bowl of a mixer, cream together the shortening and sugar. Add the eggs, 1 at a time, and beat well after each addition.

will find new favorites among this surprisingly rich haul of Americana cooking.”

A cookbook well worthy of this national acclaim and credit due the co-authors, with perhaps a bit of credit also given to the efforts of Jackson’s mom on behalf of the project. “My mom is praying for the book,” Jackson said. And certainly also worthy of mention are those townspeople who shared their taste buds and appetites during the testing stage of the over 300 recipes. The Lexington firefighters were some of the recipients of Chef Jackson’s cooking during the development of his recipes for the book. Epstein notes: “We’d just show up with food...” and she laughingly adds: “Nobody ever said they didn’t like something...” The cookbook does note the favored recipe of those sampled by the firefighters (Pork Stew with Cornmeal Dumplings). While drawing on local palates and local foods for some recipes – both Epstein and Jackson frequent the Lexington Farmer’s Market – the cookbook also presents recipes with more exotic ingredients, the local foods of regions outside of New England, items not as easily found

in our local supermarkets. Some recipes call for alligator (“Yes, really!” it says under the heading for Alligator Gumbo); elk (Elk Meatloaf); goat (Curried Goat); and callaloo greens (Callaloo Soup).

The Lighthouses and the Locavores

Lighthouses, described in the cookbook as “illuminating our coastlines and inspiring our menus,” were profiled from around the country. Those chosen were considered were for their region, their architecture, and the different kinds of backgrounds and stories associated with them. Architectural styles spanned Art Deco, Victorian, Moderne, Italianate, and one that has the distinct appearance of a rocket ship. Building features include construction of brick, metal, wood, and “tabby” – a type of cement made with sand, oyster shells, lime and water. Points of note regarding the distinctions of each lighthouse include: the first lighthouse on the American continent, which was also the last to be automated (the Boston Harbor Lighthouse); the most visited lighthouse; the most photographed; the most picturesque; the tallest;

the oldest original structure; the youngest; the most expensive; the most remote and desolate location; the lighthouse with her own MySpace page; and a lighthouse named for a Tahitian goddess with many eyes.

The lighthouse keepers, those tenders of the lights and properties of these lighthouses, are what Jackson and Epstein call “the ultimate locavores” or local eaters. These men, women, sometimes whole families – “had to get whatever they could get right out their backdoor. Either the ocean or the land and that’s where it had to come from,” said Epstein. They fished, planted gardens, sometimes bringing in dirt, sometimes bringing in chickens and cows. The book describes a keeper who raised a herd of cows on his lighthouse island. At low tide the cows sometimes wandered off toward small surrounding islands, stranding them there at high tide. Milking the cows would then require the keeper to row to each of the little islands. The young daughter of another lighthouse keeper helped keep her family fed when she rescued their chickens during a storm, saving the

hens from the 40-foot waves that washed away the chicken coop. The American Lighthouse Cookbook begins with these introductory words: “Passion and idealism underscored by loneliness. Bravery at sea, on a daily basis. Danger, defeated by the warmth of a meal at home.” In this holiday season, the warmth of a meal at home can surely be inspired by the stories and recipes in this cookbook.

The cookbook begins in the Northeast Atlantic region, and ends at the Great Lakes, both parts of the country that I’ve claimed as home. Split Rock Lighthouse on Lake Superior was the autumn destination for hiking and leaf viewing when I grew up. Included here are two recipes from a winter menu from that region: 1) Wild Rice With Mushrooms and Walnuts, recipe by Chef Jackson; 2) Apple Pudding Cake, recipe from a Minnesota orchard where I used to pick apples. And drawing from the coastal region of the Northeast, a recipe from the menu for Sheffield Island Lighthouse in Connecticut: Scallops Dusted with Wild Mushroom Powder, recipe by Chef Jackson.