

\* THINGS

# Farmers' Market

We came, we saw, we bought, we ate,  
we came back for more

By SUSAN LAMPERT SMITH

What did Madison eat for breakfast 150 years ago? You can taste a bit of pioneer fare — or at least pioneer ingredients — if you happen by the Dane County Farmers' Market on any given Saturday.

The market moves indoors to the Madison Senior Center between the first of the year and its outdoor debut the fourth Saturday in April. The space is cozy, and the ingredients generally feature what's available in winter: eggs, meats, greens, breads, preserves, and, of course, cheese.

But the compensation is a hot breakfast featuring market ingredients and created by the Friends of the Farmers Market, along with help from volunteer chefs and others.

In honor of Madison's 150th birthday, the sponsoring group, the local Slow Foods chapter, is planning to serve a breakfast with traditional Madison foods. The menu is likely to feature shagbark hickory nuts, woodland goodies familiar to Madison area pioneers and an indigenous food that Slow Foods is trying to preserve.

While hickory nut bread or waffles sound tasty, breakfast patrons might

hope that menu doesn't stick too closely to history.

Back when pioneer innkeeper Rosaline Peck set up her tavern near today's 100 block of South Butler Street, one of her specialties included turtle soup, with the main ingredient dug from beneath the ice of the nearby lake. Lynn Watrous Hamel quotes Peck in her "A Taste of Old Madison":

"They were put into the cellar to thaw before we could dress them, and going down a few days later, I found they had thawed out and were beginning to crawl around the bottom of the cellar."

Not quite what you'd like to see on your breakfast plate.

It would be interesting to see Rosaline Peck's reaction if she could return to Madison and stroll around the Square to see the local bounty available to today's Madison chefs.

The opening of the outdoor Dane County Farmers' Market around the Capitol Square truly marks the end of winter in Madison.

Yes, there will be garlicky ramps and watercress and other early spring greens, as well as vegetables coaxed out of the ground much earlier than Peck could have imagined, thanks to "high tunnel" greenhouses.

But it's not just the plants that are

coming out of hibernation.

The first markets seem to wake the entire city out of its winter nap. Friends and acquaintances who haven't seen each other since Halloween meet over steaming coffee and doughnuts fried by Amish women. This is where 20,000 Madisonians and visitors meet for breakfast.

Chefs, amateur and professional, can plan the evening's menu, browsing among 160 vendors whose goods range from buffalo salami to fresh trout, sheep's milk yogurt to maple syrup, and pesto to purple potatoes.

It's not all about food, not by a long shot. At every corner, people promoting causes ranging from stopping the war in Iraq to promoting better health for house rabbits wait at every corner, with petitions and literature.

You're likely to see Madison's mayor, and a guy who walks around the square each morning chanting from the Koran. You'll hear African drummers and Peruvian flute players.

You might even see one of those pampered house rabbits being carried around the Square in a baby carrier, and being offered samples of the seasonal greens by its owner.

Wonder what Rosaline Peck would make of that? Breakfast, probably. ■



Allen Hambrecht