



A Good Old-Fashioned Corn Shuckin’

The following is a Foxfire tale, long in the making, compiled from stories told by sixteen different contacts who were interviewed for The Foxfire Magazine over its 40-year history—snippets borrowed from seven books in the Foxfire series and Faith, Family, and The Land, our 40th anniversary anthology of quotes just such as these. The contacts’ names follow their respective passages in parentheses. Each contact tells a small piece of the story of a fall harvest-time tradition—“them old shuckin’s.”

They’d gather in the fall of the year when harvest time came. They’d gather the corn, and they’d have a corn shuckin’. They’d invite all of the neighbors—boys and girls, men and women. (Preacher John Freeman) Ever’body’uz invited. Wasn’t nobody skipped. They invited th’young and old. They all come together. And you never seen such corn shucks in your life. We never counted none on sleepin’ that night. (Florence and Lawton Brooks) We’d have our lanterns and lights around, y’know, and we’d shuck up into th’night. (Marinda Brown) We had corn shuckings, but not barn dances. Back then they would church you if you danced. (Bernice Taylor) You’d go t’ maybe a dozen different corn shuckin’s in one fall. (Hillard Green)

People farmed in those days, and they lived on the farm. They’d gather their corn in the fall of the year and pile it under the shed in the crib. Then they’d go out in the community and invite all their neighbors to come in and help husk the corn. They’d come in, and the womenfolks, a lot of them would help at the corn pile, and a lot of the older women would gather in and prepare the meal for the people. (Esco Pitts) But the women didn’t go to the shucking business until after dinner. Everybody that came brought a dish of something. Then Mama would cook what she was gonna cook, and we had plenty to eat. (Bernice Taylor) The women would bunch in and help get supper.



Then we’d all have a drink and probably have a dancin’ th’reast a’th’night, if we got done in time. God, you never seen such shuckin’ corn.
—Florence and Lawton Brooks

Lots of times we’d have mutton and pork, and they’d bake up a sight of stuff. They’d have chicken and dumplings, punkin’ custards and apple pies, beans, and all kinds of sweet bread. We’d have plenty to eat. (Jake Waldroop)

They’d just pile up their corn in their barnyard, y’know, instead a’puttin’ it in their crib. And they’d always bury a drink right in th’middle a’that pile and pile their corn on top a’it. Then we’d have t’shuck all th’corn t’find it. We’d shuck all night t’get t’that half-gallon a’liquor. Then we’d all have a drink and probably have a dancin’ th’reast a’th’night, if we got done in time. God, you never seen such shuckin’ corn. (Florence and Lawton Brooks) That was quite a treat—to go see a lot of young people and a lot of older people. I don’t think I was ever at a corn shucking where they had a jug of moonshine hid in it. They did at some places. The person who shucked to that jug first was the top of the evening. (Aunt Lola Cannon) I was at one, and two of the younger



Lots of times they’d set ‘em a gallon jug of good ol’ corn liquor right in th’ middle of [the pile of corn]; they’d see who could shuck fastest—get t’ that jug in there first.”

—Hillard Green



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—Aunt Arie Carpenter

come in it. And ever' once in a while you'd get a plumb red ear. One I went to—was about fifteen families lived over there, Ledfords and Penlands and Duncans—whoever got th'first red ear got a Jersey cow. Nicest thing you ever looked at. Well, we got t'shuckin' around there, and finally got in a fight throwin' corn east and west. Somebody socked me with a ear down th'side a'th'head and I caught th'thing, and it'uz a blood-red ear! When it hit my head, I seen th'red corn fly. I cracked it right quick—pulled th'shuck off—and says, “Look what y'done! Gimme good luck!” (Will Zoellner)

And then they'd put th'corn in log cribs made where th'air could go though and finish dryin' the'corn they'd gathered in from th'fields. And they'd store th'pumpkins in a barn and cover'em with th'shucks and th'leavin's from th'corn t'keep them through th'winter. (Mrs. Harriet Echols) They always foddered and topped their corn—topped the corn and pulled the fodder to feed their cattle in the wintertime. And then, most of the time after the corn was shucked, they'd put it up and put the shucks away and feed the cattle them shucks in the wintertime. Then we'd have an old-time square dance—have a shindig for three or four hours. (Willard Watson)

They'd come gather around that thing, y'know, and they'd shuck corn till they give out or till they got done. And then they'd have a dance or somethin' like that, y'know. Oh, that was kindly their manner of entertainment. (Preacher John Freeman) 'Bout all th'way we had a'havin' fun was them shuckin's. But I thought it was mighty nice a'them t'have things like that. I wish they'd have'em now back like they used to. There'uz lots a'fun in that. (Florence and Lawton Brooks) If we had'em like we used to, we'd have ever'one a'you younguns come down here and we'd have th'best time. (Aunt Arie Carpenter)

That was just a good time for us all. We enjoyed bein' together and doin' somethin' t'help somebody, too. (Mrs. E. H. Brown)

men got into a fight. Some of us kids were sitting on the floor, and these two men come stumblin' around. One of 'em's hitting the other in the head with an ear of corn. They'd probably been drinkin', and, anyway, the older men put a stop to it in a hurry. I remember someone—I don't know if it was Dad or someone else—hollerin', “You'd better not step on one of these kids!” But most of the time we were peaceful people. We really were. (Bob Justus)

Then sometimes they'd have it where th'man that found th'first red ear got t'kiss th'prettiest girl, and sometimes he'd shuck like th'devil tryin' t'find a red ear a'corn. Somebody'd find one generally ever'time. It was funny because back then 'at was th'worst thing a boy and girl could do would be caught kissin'. That's th'worst thing you could do! (Florence and Lawton Brooks) The last one I went to was about seventy-eight years ago. There was a young lady named Lela Smith who lived just above us and who was planning to get married. That was in October. We went out to Mrs. Smith's house where the men had been shucking corn all morning. They shucked and they shucked, and every time they'd find a red ear, the boy would get to kiss his sweetheart. (Ellene Franklin Gowder) Sometimes th'first one that got a red ear'ud get a ten-dollar prize. That's what they called pokeberry corn. Looked like poke



Foxfire students were always game to try anything, even if a particular thing did look suspiciously like work. Aunt Arie Carpenter did in fact get the “younguns” to try their hands at shuckin' corn, and they really did have a great time—even without the moonshine!