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° [Music Througout] °
>> [Voice over]: Livermush is a unique regional pork dish that can only be found in a small area of North Carolina. Livermush is made by mixing pork scraps, pork liver, cornmeal, and spices; which are then formed into a brick. The most common way to prepare livermush is to cut the brick into half inch slices and fry them in butter. These slices are often served alone or in between two halves of a biscuit with yellow mustard or grape jelly. The production of livermush has been industrialized in the last century by local companies such as Mack's Livermush & Meats in Shelby, North Carolina and Neese's in Greensboro, North Carolina; but before livermush was mass produced it was made at home. This food tradition is thought to have been brought to Western North Carolina by German immigrants. Germans, like many other Europeans, came to America hoping to build better lives without poverty or persecution. Many Germans first settled in Pennsylvania but then journeyed to the Appalachian mountains of North Carolina. According to the United States Census of 1792 approximately 20,000 Germans were living in North Carolina. This makes up five percent of the population at the time. These Germans took an old dish, pon hoss, from their homeland and

made the old recipe work
for the new world.
Pon Hoss developed into
scrapple in Pennsylvania and
into livermush in
North Carolina.
Livermush is a dish that was
developed out of necessity.
In rural regions, nothing is
left to waste when what you had
was often all you had.
This need became
even greater during
the Great Depression
and World War II.
Using everything you had
been came a priority.
But even after this period,
the love of livermush
did not subside.
The people living in this small
area continued to make livermush
for pure enjoyment
and the love for it.
However, outside of this small
area there is little love
to be found for livermush.
The very name makes some people
gag without even tasting it.
Many would politely say,
"It's an acquired taste",
while others would
out right refuse it.
Compared to its
cousin, liver pudding,
livermush has not found wide
spread popularity and was often
associated with the
poorer classes of society.
This may be because of the
difference in ingredients used
in livermush and liver pudding.
Mush is made using cornmeal
which was seen as an uncivilized
food by many outsiders.
Missionaries and
other northerners,
brought white flour into the
Appalachian Mountains in order
to modernize the cooking methods
and recipes of the
mountain people.
White flour is used in place of
cornmeal in liver pudding and

results in a thinner,
soup like consistency.
This bias against the use of
cornmeal may play a role in
outsider's viewing livermush
as an undesirable food.
Also the name itself may
cause some to begin dry heaving.
Liver is not a food that many
modern Americans would find
appealing and most people would
not want the food that they are
about to put into their
mouth to be described as mush.
But on the other hand, in
high cuisine restaurants today,
liver is an ingredient found
in some of the most expensive
dishes on the menu but it
is very seldom a part
of the name of the dish.
Americans may eat liver in this
setting because of the ambiance
and exoticness of the situation,
where as being given a livermush
sandwich at a gas station might
throw up red flags for some.
Nowadays livermush can be
purchased from local walmarts to
be made at home, and livermush
sandwiches and biscuits can
be ordered at many
breakfast bars and gas stations.
Even with its
mainstream availability,
much of livermush's popularity
remains with the older
generation and those who
have grown up eating it.
The younger generations had
replaced livermush with easier
breakfast options.
The fast paced lives that
Americans live often does not
allow the time it takes to
prepare a proper nutritious
breakfast, leaving
foods such as livermush,
eggs, and grits in
the wake of premade,
reheatable foods.
Even with this shift towards
easier breakfast routines,
those who grew up eating

livermush still can't live without it. Because livermush is only available in a very small region of North Carolina, there are very few mentions of it in literature. In Jan Karon's Mitford series, the poor white family living in Western North Carolina sits down many mornings to find a breakfast of livermush. This representation of livermush shows it being a "poor man's food". These poor white southerners eat livermush not because they like it, though they might, but because that is what they can afford. This again shows the dichotomy of livermush being a representation of economic standing. Another mention shows that hesitation outsiders feel towards this unusual delicacy. While working at a local breakfast bar, the Ohio native main character in Jacquelyn Spangler's short story, What I Saw From There, is appalled when she serves a customer a livermush and onion sandwich. Because of livermush's regionalization, very few outsiders have ever had any experience with or have even heard of it. There are similarly unappetizing dishes across the country but there is something about livermush that seems more disgusting and inappropriate to people. As for livermush's representation in cookbooks, again the resources are very limited, but in James Villas' cookbook Southern Fried he includes a recipe for Carolina Fried Livermush.

This recipe tells how to make
livermush for scratch using
modern ingredients
such as pork belly
instead of the meat
from the head.

This cookbook is from a
contemporary cook for
contemporary customers.
Villas starts out the recipe
by giving a description of the
Shelby, North Carolina's
annual livermush festival and
encourages readers to try
livermush before they judge it.
This representation of livermush
is beneficial to its reputation.
Through this cookbook the author
is expanding the knowledge of
not only livermush but also in
how to make livermush when this
skill is being lost to the
convenience of pre made store
bought livermush.

Liver mush is a tradition
that should never be lost to
the hustle and bustle of modern
times but should be encouraged
not only by Western
North Carolinians
but outsiders as well.

This food is a representation
of the region's history and
of those who shaped it.
Cookbook authors like James
Villas and livermush producer
like Mack's help to keep this
tradition alive by spreading
the knowledge of this food and
by making in available to those
who otherwise may not have
been able to enjoy it.

So, the next time you hear
someone talking about livermush
or you are in a restaurant that
happens to be selling it try it!
You just might like it.

° [Closing Music] °