

Magnolia, Big Apple party

N.Y. Mississippians picnic in park

By **DAISY KARAM-READ**
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NEW YORK — With the wail of blues in the air and the aroma of sizzling catfish, more than 1,000 Mississippians and New Yorkers gathered for the 29th annual Mississippi Central Park Picnic on Saturday, celebrating the cultures of the Magnolia State and The Big Apple.

Under hot, sunny skies in the first landscaped park in America, citizens of both regions enjoyed this year's theme, Art in the Park. From noon to 6 p.m.,

Mississippians from every corner of the state arrived to view and buy paintings, listen to live music and eat fried catfish provided by Simmons Farm of Yazoo City.

With 500 pounds of catfish and 120 pounds of hushpuppies prepared by the Mississippi Catfish Cooking Team from Madison and sweet tea served by McAlister's Deli, the crowd ate, drank, and laughed on floral colored blankets, checkered tablecloths, and lawn chairs under Central Park's elm and sycamore trees.

The picnic had its start in 1979 when a small group of homesick

Mississippians living in New York decided to get together to honor the traditions of their home state. Because Mississippi and New York both suffered from bad reputations at the time, New Yorkers joined in and both groups proclaimed the beauties of their areas and its people. A tradition was born.

Some of Mississippi's most gifted artists exhibited their works at the picnic, including Karen Jamison. The New York Society for the Preservation of Mississippi Heritage commissioned the artist from Columbus to create a piece specifically for the 29th anniversary of the Mississippi Picnic. The crowd was lined up as she signed the colorful limited-edition commemorative

prints.

The Mississippi Gift Company, the sole company that exclusively specializes in products made in Mississippi, had a table teeming with gift items.

Governor and Mrs. Haley Barbour attended for the fifth time. "The picnic is a great opportunity to showcase Mississippi's unique culture and hospitality to the people of New York and give folks with Mississippi ties that live there a little taste of home," said Barbour.

Daisy Karam-Read is the author of "From Manhattan to Mississippi: A New Yorker Falls in Love with the South"