

Intro – 1 min

Hello all, and welcome to the first installment of my new Podcast Eatin' through the History of North America, Y'all. Title brainstorming session assistance courtesy of Justine Furr and Jen Glaze. My name is Deb Wold. I am a public history grad student at the University of West Georgia. My interest is in historical foodways which is the study of what people ate in the past. I think this is very important. We can learn a lot about people, how they lived, and their culture by the food they ate and how they prepared it.

Context - 1 30

In our first episode, we will be time-traveling back to the mid-18th and early 19th centuries in North America. We will be looking at what people ate approximately between 1750 to 1820. This is a pivotal time in North American history. We have different ethnic groups from Europe, the slaves that were brought over from Africa, and the indigenous native tribes who already resided here. The European settlers have been established for a while. The American Revolutionary War raged for eight years causing the colonies to gain independence from England. After the war, the colonies created the United States of America. The battle to form the new government continued on. Tensions never really resolved among the people who lived in the United States. These tensions eventually erupt into the Civil War in 1861. But that will be a later episode. During these times we are looking at, the people of the new nation who needed to focus on surviving everyday life. This includes filling their bellies.

People 30-sec

The people who lived on the North American continent during the 18th and 19th centuries not only used the resources that the land provided, but they brought their food preferences, tastes, and cultural traditions to their menus. I have decided to introduce you to a quick highlighted overview of five different cultural groups that lived in North America during this time. These groups are the Spanish, French, British, African Slave population, and indigenous tribes.

Spanish – 1 min

The Spanish mainly settled in the southern parts of North America, Central America, and South America. We won't touch much on the Spaniards because this area of research is currently lacking for the time period and region we are focusing on. However, I will give a quick contextual background. The Spanish are the ones responsible for sugar cane. The Spaniards started planting sugar cane in the West Indies and then brought the sugar cane up north to the North American colonies. The British eventually took over the sugar cane production from the Spanish. The most vital part of sugar cane production was slave labor.

French – 2 min

When we think of French settlements in North America, my guess is that Canada and New Orleans are the places that come to mind. French had settlers from the New Orleans area, going north to the Great Lakes region, and into Canada, the French influence on cuisine came primarily from the founding fathers and their ambassador trips to France leading up to and during the American Revolution. The most famous founding father who brought French cuisine to the limelight was Thomas Jefferson. He went so far as to bring his slave, James Hemings, to France for official chef training. James' last name, Hemings may sound familiar to you. He was the older brother to Sally Hemings, the woman whom Jefferson fathered children with. But that is a different story and debate. Let's get back on track here. Basically, Thomas Jefferson popularized French cuisine through the dinners he hosted in his home.

British – 2 min

When early American history is discussed, the most common group of people that are studied are usually the British settlers. Each location of the colonies had to deal with different soil and environments which crops would favor and others would not. James E. McWilliams' book *A Revolution in Eating* discusses the regional impact of the British diet prior to the trade routes in the early years of the settlements. In his introduction on page 15, McWilliams explains the implications of the advancement of trade. I quote "By the 1740s, American merchants were trading regularly within the colonies as well as the empire. Colonists eager to sample the foods of other regions were soon placing orders for bread and beer from Philadelphia, beef from New England, okra and rice from Carolina, and ham from Virginia. The more systematic this trade became, the more the colonies' culinary habits became less and less foreign to one another." We could go into further detail about the British settlers, but that topic is so intricate we would go down a rabbit hole that would turn this episode in a different direction.

Slaves – 1 min

African Slaves brought their own food knowledge and traditions with them from their home countries. According to McWilliams, he states that the slaves were in charge of their own food. A good example of traditional food that the African slaves brought over was yams. The yam was a vital part of the diet in West Africa. Now, it makes an appearance in most households over Thanksgiving and is a prominent part of Southern cuisine. I recently moved to Georgia from the Pacific Northwest where the yam and other root vegetables besides potatoes do not make their appearance until the autumn months, specifically closer to Thanksgiving. When I arrived during the middle of Summer, the first things I noticed in the grocery store were yams everywhere.

Indigenous – 1 min

The most important dietary contribution of the indigenous tribes was called the three sisters. This term is used amongst modern historical foodways books referring to corn, beans, and squash. The three grew in harmony and added a balanced nutritional value to their diet. Out of the three, corn was the most common crop that was accepted into the European diet, well at least the most studied, the British diet. Corn became a much more reliable crop rather than wheat that the British were trying to grow. Corn could be used in so many different ways that it naturally became part of the British diet.

Food – Intro 1 min

Traditionally cooking skills and recipes were passed down through the generations by the cooks by teaching those who may follow in her footsteps. It wasn't until Amelia Simmons who wrote a cookbook in the 18th century that the knowledge was written down. Her cookbook *American Cookery* which was published in 1796 may not be recognizable to modern-day standards. Simmons wrote in an informative paragraph form. Measurements are not always exact and sometimes may be hard to translate into today's standards without some diving into historical text.

Meat- 1 min

Settlers obtained meat wherever they could find it. In the early years, they would hunt deer, squirrels, rabbits, anything that was edible really. But as the society became more stabilized, they were able to raise their own meat sources to coincide with hunting. Reading Amelia Simmons's cookbook allowed me to see the importance of meat in the diet. She starts her cookbook off by describing "how to choose the flesh" of an animal to eat. She discusses cow, veal which is young calves, lamb, mature lambs which is called mutton, and pork. Simmons continues with different fish, shellfish, and fowl. What I found most interesting is that the first recipe is to how to cure bacon. Bacon was important to their diet and it still is one of the more popular meats in our culture.

Veg – 1 min

To make sure there is enough food to survive the winter, crops were preserved and stored. We've briefly chatted about some crops that were important to settlers' diets. Vegetables were sides or an accompaniment to meat dishes. Throughout my research, I find that the most common vegetables are the root veggies such as turnips, parsnips, and potatoes. I also saw a variety of references to beans. *Martha Washington's Booke of Cookery* which was edited by Karen Hess has a substantial section on pickling. Pickling helped preserve food throughout the year. Not only did they pickle more familiar foods such as cucumbers and different fish, but there is a recipe for asparagus, lettuce, and oysters.

Fruit – 1 min

All three copies of original cookbooks that I have perused through had recipes for fruit jams, jellies, and pies. The number one fruit that I came across was the apple. My favorite go-to apple recipe is found in a cookbook called *Dining at Monticello* which was researched and written for The Thomas Jefferson Monticello in Charlottesville, Virginia. This recipe is an apple custard pie. If you are an apple pie fan, this is delicious. Other fruits included are berries, specifically raspberries, cranberries, and currents. These berries are used in sauces or eaten as a light dessert.

Baked Goods – 1 min

Hannah Glasse published her first cookbook in 1749 in London. Future editions were published in North America. The difference between Hannah Glasse and Amelia Simmons' cookbooks is that Glasse actually divided her cookbook into chapters. She has starter recipes similar to Simmons. Hannah Glass has a substantial baked goods section in her section. Predominately, she features pies and cakes. Surprisingly, breads are hardly mentioned in any of my original sources. Glasse has four recipes buried in the chapter about wine. With grains playing an important role in crops records, it can be considered that bread was so vital and part of their soul in the way, that the recipes really did not need to be written down.

Beverages – 30 sec

The settlers in North America did not always have a reliable water source. Without any sort of treatment, fresh water can carry germ-causing diseases making people very sick and possibly die. To treat the water, the settlers distilled spirits, cider, and beer. They also boiled the water and drank tea.

30 sec Beer, cider, and ale were the most common beverage that the settlers drank. The brewing knowledge was brought over from Europe. These were brewed at home, at least in the beginning. Cider was sometimes even served for breakfast. Hard liquor had a place in the diet as well. Brandy is used in cooking. Rum was the preferred liquor before Whiskey became the popular choice.

30 sec Wine was imported for the most part prior to getting vineyards established. Chef Walter Staib has a tv show called A Taste of History where he specializes in 17th and 18th-century cooking. He also has multiple cookbooks on the topic. The most common wine he refers to is Madera wine. It seems like Thomas Jefferson had a taste for it as well. Any book referencing food and Thomas Jefferson will reference his love for wine.

30 sec Seasonal eating was a common way of life back then. The settlers had to rely on what was available throughout the year. This concept also applied to milk. According to Sandra L Oliver's *Food in Colonial and Federal America*, settlers relied on nursing cows for milk. If the cow weened the calf, milk wouldn't be available.

15 secs Oliver continues the beverage conversation stating that hot drinks such as tea, coffee, and chocolate were drinks for the well-off. These drinks also played a role in increasing the sugar in the diet because the hot drinks were bitter.

Conclusion - 1 min

I know I touched on quick overviews of different food categories. Future podcasts can delve deeper on each subject looking at origin, preparation, and consumption. We also could potentially look at overall cooking techniques, equipment, even kitchen and dining room layouts, crops and gardens. But I am hoping this intrigued you enough to stay tuned and learn more. United States is known as the melting pot. I think the roots of this started out very early in our history. Food is just an example of how much we adapted and melded together our food to create what we know as American cuisine today.

American Foodways from 1745-1820 Bibliography

Primary Resources

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