

THANKSGIVING "BY THE COOKBOOK"

Festive Recipes from Historic Cookbooks

**by Peggy M. Baker,
Director & Librarian, Pilgrim Society.**



The "First Thanksgiving" of 1621 was a community harvest feast. As America has changed over the past 375 years, so has Thanksgiving changed. The festive dinner, however, remains at its heart.

From the Pilgrims' English cookery, through the development of a truly American style of cooking during the 19th century, to today's gourmet (or microwave) meal, Thanksgiving has always blended tradition and innovation in a reflection of American life.

Join us as we explore 300 years of Thanksgiving culinary traditions!

THE 17TH & 18TH CENTURIES: ENGLISH COOKING COMES TO THE NEW WORLD

The early settlers of New England brought English cookery -- and English cookbooks -- to the new world. The *Compleat Cook* was one of the cookbooks that was

used in Plymouth Colony. It was not until 1796 that a truly American cookbook, Amelia Simmons' *American Cookery*, was published.



Pumpion Pie

from: *The Compleat Cook*; London: printed for Nathaniel Brook, 1671

Take about half a pound of Pumpion and slice it, a handfull of tyme, a little rosemary, parsley and sweet marjorum slipped off the stalks, and chop them small, then take the cynamon, nutmeg, pepper and six cloves, and beat them, take ten eggs and beat them, then mix them and beat them all together and put in as much sugar as you think fit, then fry them like a froize*, after it is fryed, let it stand till it be cold, then fill your pye, take sliced apples thinne round wayes, and lay a rowe of the froize, and layer the apples with currants betwixt the layer while your pye is fitted, and put in a good deal of sweet Butter before you close it, when pye is baked, take six yelks of eggs, some whitewine or vergis*, and make a caudle* of this, but not too thick, cut up the lid and put it in, stir them well together whilst the eggs and pumpions be not perceived and so serve it up.

*froize = a kind of pancake or omelet

*vergis = verjuice, juice from unripened grapes or from crab apples or other sour fruit

*caudle = a warm spiced and sugared drink

THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY: GREAT AMERICAN HOME COOKING

The early 19th century was an era of great American home cooking; a large variety and a large quantity of food were available. The Thanksgiving holiday, not yet a national holiday, was celebrated throughout the United States, on a state-by-state basis, with festive family dinners. Turkey and pumpkin pie had become part of the standard Thanksgiving menu, which focused on simple, traditional New England food featuring native American ingredients.



Mince Pies

from: *The American Frugal Housewife*. By Mrs. Child.
Tenth edition. Boston: Carter & Hendee, 1832

Boil a tender, nice piece of beef -- any piece that is clear from sinews and gristle; boil it till it is perfectly tender. When it is cold, chop it very fine, and be very careful to get out every particle of bone and gristle. The suet is sweeter and better to boil half an hour or more in the liquor the beef has been boiled in; but few people do this. Pare, core, and chop the apples fine. If you use raisins, stone them. If you use currants, wash and dry them at the fire. Two pounds of beef, after it is chopped; three quarters of a pound of suet; one pound and a quarter of sugar; three pounds of apples; two pounds of currants, or raisins. Put in a gill of brandy; lemon-brandy is better, if you have any prepared. Make it quite moist with new cider. I should not think a quart would be too much; the more moist the better, if it does not spill out into the oven. A very little pepper. If you use corn meat, or tongue, for pies, it should be well soaked, and boiled very tender. If you use fresh beef, salt is necessary in the seasoning. One ounce of cinnamon, one ounce of cloves. Two nutmegs add to the pleasantness of the flavor; and a bit of sweet butter, put upon the top of each pie, makes them rich, but these are not necessary. Baked three quarters of an hour. If your apples are rather sweet, grate in a whole lemon.

THE CIVIL WAR: A HOLIDAY PROCLAIMED, COOKING REVOLUTIONIZED

In 1846, Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*, began a campaign to make the last Thursday in November a national Thanksgiving Day. Her campaign bore fruit in 1863, when President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a nationwide Thanksgiving Day. Every President since Lincoln has proclaimed a national Thanksgiving Day on a Thursday in late November.

The effects of the Civil War were not just military and political. The War speeded the industrialization of food processing. It brought about widespread acceptance of canned foods and other newly commercial ingredients such as baking powder and yeast. The War also ushered in faster food transport, refrigeration, and the introduction of out-of-season ingredients.



To Roast a Turkey

from: *Mrs. Hale's New Cook Book*. By Mrs. Sarah J. Hale.
Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson and Brothers, 1857

Prepare a stuffing of pork sausage meat, one beaten egg, and a few crumbs of bread; or, if sausages are to be served with the turkey, stuffing as for fillet of veal; in either, a little shred shallot is an improvement. Stuff the bird under the breast; dredge it with flour, and put it down to a clear brisk fire; at a moderate distance the first half-hour but afterwards nearer. Baste with butter; and when the turkey is plumped up, and the steam draws towards the fire, it will be nearly done; then dredge it lightly with flour, and baste it with a little more butter, first melted in the basting-ladle. Serve with gravy in the dish, and bread sauce in a tureen. It may be garnished with sausages, or with fried forcemeat, if veal-stuffing be used. Sometimes the gizzard and liver are dipped into the yolk of an egg, sprinkled with salt and cayenne, and then put under the pinions, before the bird is put to the fire. Chestnuts, stewed in gravy, are likewise eaten with turkey. A very large turkey will require three hours' roasting; one of eight or ten pounds, two hours; and a small one, an hour and a half.

THE LATE 19TH CENTURY: AMERICA DINES OUT

The late 19th century was the great period of American restaurant cookery. Elaborate restaurant meals in turn influenced home cooking. For the middle class, home cooking became a complex art demanding considerable skill. Cookbooks and cooking schools

proliferated. Many cooking school teachers produced their own cookbooks, many cookbooks were also produced by the food industry itself. Alessandro Filippini, head chef at the famed New York City restaurant, Delmonico's, wrote *The Table: how to buy food, how to cook it, and how to serve it*, adapting his very elaborate restaurant menus and recipes to the capabilities of the American housewife.

Chestnut Stuffing

from: *The Table: how to buy food, how to cook it, and how to serve it*. By Alessandro Filippini. Rev. Ed. New York: Charles L. Webster & Company, 1891.



Peel a good-sized, sound shallot, chop it up very fine, place in a saucepan on the hot range with one tablespoonful of butter, and let heat for three minutes without browning, then add a quarter of a pound of sausage meat. Cook five minutes longer, then add ten finely chopped mushrooms, twelve well-pounded, cooked, peeled chestnut; mix all well together.

Season with one pinch of salt, half a pinch of pepper, half a saltspoonful of powdered thyme, and a teaspoonful of finely chopped parsley.

Let just come to a boil, then add half an ounce of fresh bread crumbs and twenty-four whole cooked and shelled chestnuts; mix all well together, being careful not to break the chestnuts. Let cool off, and then stuff the turkey with it.