

SOME NOTES ON 18TH CENTURY FOOD PREPARATION

By the 18th century, the design of the kitchen fireplace was changing. The massive walk-in style of the 17th century kitchen with the bake oven on the back or side wall was being replaced by a more shallow style, which threw more heat into the room and was safer for the cook to use, with the bake oven now on the front wall. Also, the green wood lug pole which suspended the heavy kettles over the fire was replaced by an iron swinging crane which did not burn through and fall, spilling scalding food on the cook. For the most part, this new arrangement remained in place until the cook-stove replaced the fireplace as standard equipment in about 1840.

An assortment of pots and pans were available to use on the hearth where most of the cooking took place. These included the cast iron bake kettle/Dutch oven, long-handled skillet or frying pan, spiders (frying pans on 3 legs) in several sizes, posnet/stew pan, gridiron, trivet, waffle iron, wafer iron and salamander. Reflector ovens called Tin Kitchens and small bakers for apples, etc, were made of tin. Large cast iron kettles, the hanging griddle and tea kettle hung from pot hooks and trammels on the crane. This enabled the cook to raise and lower the height of them over the flames. Some brass, bell metal and copper were also used to make cooking equipment. Not all homes had a good collection of utensils. Some people started housekeeping with only a kettle, spider and long-handled spoon.

The homemaker of that day had to be a good manager when it came to planning meals. Meals were planned to use the foods available in season and, at the same time, to preserve by drying, salting, storing or freezing enough food for the winter months. She also had to maintain ample amounts of all supplies used year round. Meals varied greatly as they do today, depending on the education, economic situation and preferences of each family. Country people tended to eat simpler but heartier meals than city dwellers. New England cooks had a reputation for being able to “set a good table” for unexpected guests.

If you wish to know more about the way people lived during this time, the Holliston Public Library has a copy of a well documented book on this subject, *Our Own Snug Fireside—Images of New England Homes, 1760–1860*, Jane C. Nylander, Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.

SUMMARY/CLASS OUTLINE

1. While Nancy Chamberlain is talking with the children, prepare the coals on the hearth and pre-heat the spiders.
 - a) With a shovel, place a pile of hot coals on the hearth.
 - b) Place a spider over the coals.
2. Have the children come up one at a time to place a spoonful of the cornmeal pancake mixture in the spider. (Volunteers turn the cornmeal pancakes with metal spatula.)
3. Place 1 cornmeal pancake on a plate which the child will eat as his/her snack for the day.
4. When all the children in the group have made their cornmeal pancakes:
 - a) wipe out the spider;
 - b) return the coals to the fire;
 - c) place new logs on fire as needed.
5. If needed, make cornmeal pancake batter for next group. (Generally the batter made in the morning is sufficient for the day's participants.)

Corn Meal Pancakes

1 cup	yellow corn meal	3/4 cup	flour
1 cup	boiling water	1 tsp.	salt
2 Tblsp.	oil	1 tsp.	baking powder
1 Tblsp.	sugar	1	egg, beaten
1 cup	milk		

Mix corn meal and boiling water. Add remainder of ingredients in order given above.