

Festive Feasting in those Olden Times

WHAT was the fare like at Christmas-time two centuries ago when the traditions and customs of the Old World were being implanted in the Colonies, where they were molded, enlarged, and re-exported? Naturally, the colonial hostesses directed the preparations of dishes to suit tastes formed in England or other European countries. But they took into account also tastes formed in the Colonies for meats, vegetables, fish, and fruits found more plentifully in the Americas—such as venison, turkey, cod, potatoes (one of the greatest Spanish discoveries in the New World), cocoa (another discovery in America), squash, pumpkin—than in contemporary Europe.

A dinner served at Boston Dec. 22, 1769, was recorded as consisting of "Large baked Indian whortleberry pudding; dish of sauguetach [succotash]; dish of clams; dish of oysters; dish of codfish; haunch of venison; dish of sea fowl (ducks and geese); dish of frost fish and eels; apple pie; cranberry tart and cheese."

The general compositions of menus for festive occasions in the 18th century are reflected in what was served to guests at the historic old Morris-Jumel mansion in New York City.

As restored and maintained since 1907 as a public museum by the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Washington Headquarters Association, its archives are a treasury of information on living habits in 18th century and early 19th century America.

Items from menus that were gustatory treats to those who were entertained or who stopped for refreshment at the Morris-Jumel mansion could be pleasing novelties to Christmas-time guests now.

For caller or luncheon or dinner guest there was, of course, the traditional wassail bowl of Old England, which got its name from "Was-halle," the Anglo-Saxon phrase for "Here's to you" (our Christmas toast to you).

CHRISTMAS PUNCH

(For eighty servings)

- 1 quart strong black tea
- 1 bottle brandy
- 1 bottle black (Jamaica) rum
- 1 bottle whiskey
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup pineapple shredded
- 1 cup orange
- 1 cup lemon
- 1 bottle champagne

Use a large crock or pot for mixing. Stir in ingredients which have been chilled thoroughly in advance: tea, brandy, rum, orange juice, sugar and a good dash of the bitters. When serving time comes, have ready a large punch bowl in which there is a chunk of ice. Pour the mixture over this. Top with the iced champagne.

The ice for the Morris-Jumel mansion came from a dugout icehouse for which blocks were cut from the Hudson or East River in February and packed in sawdust.

Apple toddy was a favored hot drink for men, as was buttered rum. Readers of Kenneth Roberts' vivid 18th century historical novel, *Northwest Passage*, will recall Major Robert Rogers' addiction to the latter drink, made by pouring a jigger of black rum into a glass. Add 2 teaspoons of sugar and 2 teaspoons of sweet butter. Fill the glass with boiling water and stir well.

That punch or buttered rum were also morning drinks is indicated in an English gentleman's account of his fare in Virginia during a holiday time in the 18th century:

"Their breakfast tables have generally the cold remains of the former day, hashed or fricaseed. Venison pastry. Punch, beer or cider. Chocolate, tea, coffee. Their dinner good beef, veal, mutton, venison, turkeys and geese. Fowls boiled and roasted. Pies, puddings, etc. for dessert."

The cooking was done in open hearths, of course, for kitchen stoves were not in general use before the 19th century. The hearths at inns and houses such as the Morris-Jumel mansion were usually fitted with turnspits for meats and game, as well as kettles for vegetables, and side ovens for breads, pastries, puddings. Note that puddings were mentioned in both the Christmas-time menus quoted in preceding paragraphs.

There were some liked soup, too. The most distinguished of all Virginians, George Washington, did.

The period in September and October 1776 that the Morris-Jumel mansion entered history as Gen. Washington's Continental Army headquarters was one in which he might have enjoyed a dish he mentioned later with favor: Peppercorn, which was



The roast being served in the Morris-Jumel mansion dining room is duplication of Christmas feast of two centuries ago. Authentic costumes worn in the scene include family heirlooms of members of the Washington Headquarters Assoc.

PEPPERCORN SOUP

- 1 lb. honeycomb tripe, cut in 1-inch cubes
- 2 veal knuckles (about 1 to 1½ lbs. each)
- 2 quarts water
- 1 bay leaf, crumpled
- 1 tsp. marjoram
- 1 tsp. thyme
- 1 tsp. basil
- 1 tsp. salt
- 2 tsp. crushed peppercorns
- 2 medium-sized green peppers, sliced
- 2 medium-sized onions, sliced
- 3 cups cubed potatoes (about 3 medium-sized potatoes)
- 1½ cups milk
- 1 cup chopped parsley

Place tripe and veal knuckles in soup kettle or large saucepan; add water, seasonings. Heat to boiling over medium heat. Cover and cook 10 minutes. Skim, if necessary. Cover

and cook over low heat 3 hours. Remove bones. Meanwhile, prepare vegetables: parsley, green peppers, onions, and potatoes. Add vegetables to stock. Cover and cook over low heat 40 minutes, or until vegetables are tender. Just before serving add milk and additional peppercorns, if desired. Heat to serving temperature over low heat, stirring occasionally. Serve in large mugs or bowls. This recipe makes about eight servings.

For sweets or desserts at Morris-Jumel mansion festive occasions there naturally were mince pies and plum puddings. The former were made of minced mutton mixed with raisins and sugar. Originally a meat pie, the mince pie has become something else now. It was believed that if a "mutton [mince] pie" was eaten at Christmas the eater would be sure of at least one happy month. Many remember that—
*Little Jack Horner sat in a corner
Eating a Christmas pie;
He put in his thumb, and pulled out a plum;
And said, "What a good boy am I!"*

His Christmas pie was our mince pie, and the "plumb" he pulled out was a fat raisin.

The term "plum pudding," for another dessert, is a misapplication of the original name.

Eighteenth century Christmas or "plum" puddings were made of boiled beef or mutton thickened with brown bread and injected liberally with hock or sherry. The mixture was tied up in a cloth bag and plunged into a boiler. When half-boiled, the bag was taken up for raisins, currants, prunes and spice to be added to the contents.

In that century Christmas fare continued to include the plumb porridge of which Samuel Pepys wrote so feelingly. This was a strong broth of shin beef, spiced with raisins, cur-

rants, and prunes, double refined sugar, and "strengthened" with two quarts of old hock and sherry. It was thickened with breadcrumbs and served in a tureen.

Pepys noted on a Christmas day in his classic diary:

"I dined by my wife's bedside with great content, having a mess of brave plumb porridge and a roasted pullet for dinner, and I sent for a mince pie abroad, my wife not being well to make any herself yet."

That now standard Thanksgiving and Christmas tasty in America, the pumpkin pie, is undoubtedly of American origin. Just where in the Colonies or when it originated is conjectural. Significantly, it is not mentioned in either of the 18th century American menus quoted here. There is no indication it appeared on the table at Morris-Jumel mansion until a much later date. However, there is a recommended recipe:

PUMPKIN PIE

- 1 cup finely ground sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon ginger
- 1/2 teaspoon allspice
- 1/2 teaspoon cloves
- 1 1/2 cups cooked pumpkin
- 1 pint of cream
- 2 eggs
- 8 inch unbaked pie shell
- 2 tablespoons of rum (black)

Work up ingredients until smooth. Place in ceramic or tin pie shell. Bake at 425 degrees 15 minutes; lower temperature to moderate (350 degrees). Continue baking then until firm, which will require about half an hour.

The colonial accompaniment of pumpkin pie was sharp cheese.

After this and other courses indicated above, diners were served with oranges from the West Indies, apples, late pears and nuts from orchards or woods close by, and candies especially prepared for the Christmas trade by the sugar-bakers who obtained their crude-sugar from the West Indies. "Mints" were made in the home kitchen:

- 1 lb. 16X sugar
- 4 teaspoons water
- 7 drops oil of peppermint or spearmint

Put the three ingredients in the top of a double boiler. Stir until sugar is dissolved, then place over boiling water. When the mixture hardens slightly on top, it is ready to drop from a teaspoon onto lightly buttered plate or waxed paper.

—CLARK KINNAIRD

"Mark Twain," adopted as a pen name by Samuel Clemens, was a riverboat pilot's call to indicate that the water was two fathoms deep.

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