

Paul Revere's Kitchen (And some food from it)

By the middle to late 1700s, the artisan and merchant class in the American colonies had become quite well to do, and the sparsely furnished homes of their ancestors, the Puritans, were giving way to ones containing well made furniture, more and better cooking implements, changes in clothing styles and paintings hanging on the walls.

The 18th century fireplace in the home of a prosperous businessman such as Paul Revere, no doubt had a device called a chimney or kettle crane, which allowed the cook to raise and lower the kettles used to cook. This also freed the cook from having to keep her left hand on the mantle to balance herself while she tended her fires and pots. Yes, she had multiple fires all at the same time. The oversized fireplaces in those days were not to accommodate huge logs and contain roaring fires; they allowed room for more than one fire so that the cook could have a pot or kettle on high heat, another simmering, while in the center a roast would be turning on a spit. To accomplish this, various types of wood were used. Dried maple, black birch and beech were used for regular fires, some green (uncured) wood for a slow or cool fire, and perhaps black locust for a very hot fire.

One of the hazards of this type of cooking arrangement was burns to the hand. (Remember that we left the cook balancing herself with her left hand a few sentences back?) Sometimes the underside of the mantle became charred, and if she forgot to look, a burn could result. So before talking about the food she is to cook, we will mention another essential – something that could be found on just about any mantle: burn solution. Undoubtedly there were many of these, but this one we know works, and it was easy to make. Start with 1 oz. of permanganate of potash, and 1qt. of boiled water, which has been allowed to cool. Put this in a bottle and cork, then shake well to dissolve the permanganate. Take 1 teaspoon of this and place into ½ pint of water. When burned, soak a cloth in this solution and apply.

As to what was eaten in those days, much has been written. Most of the spices known to us were obtainable then. What isn't so well known is how to make these foods, so here are four recipes that almost certainly were placed on Paul Revere's table fairly regularly:

Apple Butter Boil down a kettle of cider to 2/3 of the quantity. Pare, core and slice apples and put as many into the cider as you think your kettle will hold without boiling over. Let it boil slowly, stirring often. When done, spice with cinnamon and, if you like it sweet, put in some sugar.

Indian (or corn) **Bread** Two pints of Indian meal, one pint of flour, two pints of sweet milk, one pint sour milk, ½ pint sugar, one teaspoon salt, one teaspoon soda. Mix, bake slowly in a Dutch Oven for 1½ hours.

Boston Brown Bread Take 4 cups full of Indian meal and 4 cups full of rye meal (not flour; meal is coarser than flour), sift through a coarse wire sieve, add 2 teaspoons soda, a little salt, 1 cup molasses, 1 cup sour milk and water sufficient to make a soft dough. Bake 2 hours in a brick oven.

Plumb Pudding 6 oz. suet, cut up fine; 6 oz raisins, stones removed; 6 oz. currents, washed and dried in a cloth; 3 oz. stale bread; 3 oz. sifted flour; 3 eggs, lightly beaten; 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon; grate ½ a nutmeg; 1 teaspoon salt; ½ pint of milk; 4 oz. angelica root, candied and sliced thin (similar to citron); ½ candied citron. Mix dry ingredients together, add milk and ½ glass of brandy. Take a piece of linen large enough to fold in half. Put it in boiling water, wring out and flour it. Put mixture in the linen, tie it up tightly and sew to keep in place. Place this in 5 quarts of boiling water and boil covered for 6 hours. Add more water if necessary.

Now all you have to do is get the fireplace set up, follow the directions, and enjoy!

Sources

Forgotten Household Crafts

John Seymour

Alfred A. Knopf

New York, N.Y. 1987

Dr. Chase's Third, Last and Complete Receipt Book

A.W. Chase, M.D.

F.B. Dickenson & Co.

Detroit, Mich. 1888

For Meate and Medicine

Ann Leighton

Houghton Mifflin Co. 1967

Also personal research done by Robert Grigg for the Colebrook Historical Society, May, 1997