

Eating, Drinking, & Visiting in the Southern Colonies

Breakfast

Due to so many different social classes, the diet and way Southerners would eat varied. For example, the family of a wealthy planter might delay breakfast until half past nine in the morning, but the farmer who worked his own fields, the townsman who opened his own shop, and even the planter who served as his own overseer took their first meal of the day at or soon after sunrise. Breakfast often included porridge or mush, which is a warm cereal that was made from cornmeal, oats, or beans. They may have had bread with butter or even jam if wealthy enough to afford it. Whenever colonists ate, they ate heartily. Many immigrants from other European countries were surprised by the amount of food colonists would eat at a meal.

Dinner

Shockingly, dinner, the main meal of the day, might come at noon, but it was most often served after one o'clock in the afternoon! The latest time for dinner would be shortly after 3 p.m. Supper, the "evening" meal, was usually made up of leftovers and was served cold unless you were a plantation owner's family. Families from this group had hot and often new food to eat from each night of the week. However, middle & lower class families did have hot meals for special occasions like special church events or if a guest was coming to stay in their home.

Fireplaces & Dinnerware

Almost all cooking was done in a fireplace. In a family's original log cabin, the fireplaces was a room where other indoor activities went on. Often people would visit with each other or even have homeschooling in this area. If a family could afford a larger home, the kitchen, with a fireplace, was designed more for cooking than for heating and would even be separate from the main house at times! While super cold during the winter, this would keep cooking odors from being in the living quarters and keep the danger of the house catching fire much lower (unfortunately, many homes did catch fire during this time period).

A few of the great plantations had silverware or even fine China dishes, but even the simplest dishes we see today were not common in the homes of ordinary people until about two hundred years later. Most families commonly ate from wooden dishes. Often spoons were the ONLY tool, and each member of the family dipped each bite directly from the cooking pot as they ate! As time

passed, more people could afford a wooden bowl for each member of the family along with forks and knives.

Learning to Cook

Cooking depended largely on the women in the family. Most women kept collections of recipes and passed them onto their daughters and there was much trading of recipes among friends; especially when husbands or children would complain about the taste of a dish. Few cookbooks were available. Early ones came from England, but these books were mostly intended for upper-class plantation homes; far too many people of the lower or middle class did not read well enough to make use of the published recipes well.

So, you may be asking, how did women learn how to cook if they couldn't read a recipe? Most women learned to cook from watching their mothers. Also, any experimenting they might make were from necessity more than from anything else. Husbands and sons would bring home whatever they hunted, so wives would cook things like wild hog, beavers, rabbit, possums, raccoons, squirrels, deer, or even bear! Once the meat was used for dinner, jerky was a common snack made from the leftovers. However, experimenting wasn't just for the middle and lower class women, plantation owners relied on slaves to cook the majority of their food so new recipes had to be tried together since slaves were forbidden to learn how to read.

Common Food & Drink

The colonists of the Southern Colonies enjoyed a wide variety of food when compared to the environment they had in England. For example, instead of just rye bread, colonists enjoyed corn and wheat bread as well. Diets included a lot of meat which we've already explored but turkey was a new delicacy that many colonists loved due to the size of the bird. Chicken was also apart of the colonists' diet but only for special occasions; which included special preachers (who were rumored to love chicken) and on holidays. Eggs from these birds were enjoyed during the summer months too. When it came to drinks, most colonists had to drink milk as soon as it was milked from a cow or they needed to find a source of water. For adults, wine or beer was a common drink in the evenings.

Visiting

There's a reason the South is known for their hospitality. Visiting with other families was something that most families looked forward to doing if the

opportunity came up. When visitors arrived at someone's house, the owner would put their comfort and needs first. For example, the best food in the house would be given to guests and families would find ways to keep them entertained through interesting conversation.

Slavery & Food

Slaves had very different options when it came to what they ate. For example, most slaves received the same food rations each week on Saturday. This would include corn meal, lard, some meat, molasses, peas, greens, sweet potatoes, and flour. Slaves could also eat any vegetables they grew themselves if they had a garden near their cabin. This had to be permitted by the slave's owner but the owner could pick any vegetables they wanted from the garden first.

Meals were made and consumed by daybreak in the slaves' cabins due to such an early start time to begin working in the fields. Breakfast would usually be cornbread & pork. Dinner would be roasted meats with vegetables. However, dinner could be interrupted at any time because any guest or traveler coming through a plantation was expected to be fed. To alert a slave that a meal was needed to be prepared, certain bells would be rung. Many slaves would return to cold food.