Foodlore and Recipes

Everyone eats. Food is an important part of the day, with much time spent preparing, eating, and cleaning up after it. When people want to get to know new people, they eat together. When they want to catch up with old friends, they eat together. When business men need to develop a relationship of trust, they eat together. Eating is a universal experience, but also a deeply personal ritual.

Food habits are so distinct to folk groups that they are often categorized almost politically. For example, most restaurants have a certain country from which all their foods originate. Beyond that, there are regional differences in national food items, and traditional differences passed down in families that bind them together.

People who eat together form close community bonds. The ingredients they have access to, how they choose to prepare them, and how they choose to eat set them apart from other groups. Recipes are a small window into that highly personalized group, but one without very much context. Often recipes are written out without the actual nuance that goes into preparing a meal, and they lack the stories and feelings that are attached to certain recipes. Rarely will they mention in the actual recipes, what special occasions the recipe is used on. Regardless of their limitation, recipes are one of the best ways to preserve family foodlore.

Recipes (FA 01 354)

The Platt family is of English stock, and has been members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for several generations in a small town in Southern Utah. When the children in the Platt family get married, they are given a book of family recipes.

Their recipes are divided into Meats, Breads, Vegetables, and Desserts, though there is less distinction between the categories than the rigid titles would suggest. They have few dessert recipes, with not a single cookie included, but some of their bread and vegetable recipes could probably be included in a dessert cookbook. Things like apple cider squash and sweet potato pudding are included in separate sections, despite being equally unhealthy. In fact, most of their ‘vegetable’ recipes are as unhealthy as their dessert recipes.

Traditional Recipes (FA 01 362)
Traditional recipes are the ones that families like from generation to generation. They are passed down verbally and as written recipe cards, but relying on the written instructions can’t always present an accurate representation of the traditional dish. Recipes themselves are changed and tweaked by each successive generation to become something completely different from the original food.

One recipe that is often written is the Waldorf Red Velvet cake recipe. It’s a recipe with a story to go along with it. Though the story doesn’t have any evidence to back it up, the cake itself gets people to pass on the recipe.

**Waldorf Astoria Red Velvet Cake (FA 01 362)**

*(200 Cake recipe/ Neiman Marcus Cake)*

**Cream:**

- 1 ½ C sugar
- 1 C shortening

**Add:**

- 2 eggs (beat)
- Sift:
  - 2 C flour
  - 1/8 tsp. salt
  - 1 T cocoa (add alternately with 1 C buttermilk)
  - 1 tsp. vanilla
  - 1 oz. red food coloring
  - 1 oz. water

**Beat well**

**Fold in:**

- 1 T vinegar
- 1 T baking soda

**Bake 30-35 minutes at 350.**

**Use decorators icing.**

Many traditional recipes are desserts, because desserts are the most exciting addition to a meal, and are commonly changed based on the family tastes, whereas main dishes can be made over and over the exact same way with little complaint.
A family’s traditional recipes reveal a lot about their family history and national identity. There are American traditional foods, but America is also a land filed with people of diverse origins. While people may adopt the culture of the melting pot, giving up their comfort food is a whole other battle.

Recipes that look like sugar cookies have names like ‘Spritz’ and ‘Goodies’. Pancake recipes have names like ‘Ponkokars’. Some are hardly recipes at all, but rather a simple treat that a family enjoyed together. For example, ‘Angels on Horseback’ is a thick piece of cheese wrapped in bacon and roasted over an open flame. Hardly more than a vague instruction, yet an entire family enjoy the rare occasion when they can partake of such a delicacy.

Some recipes come from nothing, from when a family has very little food and puts them together in a new way out of necessity. That’s how ‘Onion Pie’ originated. Along with an unbaked pie crust, all the pie needs is eggs, cheese, salsa and onions. Somehow, the sparse ingredients came together in a pleasing way, and became part of the family tradition.

**Recipes That Have Been Passed Down Within Families (FA 01 704)**

The process of passing down is a bit of a refining process for recipes. Things that nobody likes get gradually forgotten and original recipes are perfected through a gauntlet of generations of chefs. One of the interesting things about older recipes is how they manage to be healthful despite their originator’s lack of knowledge about nutrition. Mostly this stems from the innate nature of the human body to crave nutrients that it lacks. Foods that aren’t nutritionally helpful run the risk of being lost within a generation or two, unless they’re very good.

There are quite a few foods that fall into the category of ‘holiday foods.’ They are popular, difficult to make, and usually contain seasonal ingredients like pumpkin or cranberries. Holiday foods get a pass to be less healthy than food that would be made on a regular basis, because holidays are special.

**‘S Home Recipe (FA 01 714)**

American recipes include many variations of Jello, ‘salads’ made with more mayonnaise than vegetables, and things preserved in jars. There are a great multitude of meatloaf recipes, each with a slight variation on an overall theme. Also included are ‘Dandelion Greens’ and ‘Hard Times Cake’ which were both probably made in times of desperation.

**Recipes Using Cream and Quilts (FA 01 916)**
One of the most difficult parts of college for a lot of people is the difference in food. Rare is the college student who has the time or means to make food anything like the simplest meal made at home. For students raised on a farm or dairy, switching to grocery store bought produce etc. can be disheartening. Food means home, so the shift in eating as much as anything can be one of the key factors in homesickness.

**Mrs. Fields Cookie Recipe (And Other Recipes Someone Paid Too Much For) (FA 01 1143)**

Another possible origin for a traditional recipe is a professional source. Mostly urban legends, folklore exists that testifies of the origin of delicious dessert recipes bought for hundreds of dollars from a restaurant or other food provider. The most popular is the ‘Mrs. Fields’ chocolate cookie recipe, offered in almost endless variations, each recipe claiming to come from the famous cookie company.

The rumor is that a woman asked the Mrs. Fields Co. for their chocolate chip cookie recipe. They agreed, for a price. They said that for two-fifty, they’d send the recipe to her. She put it on her credit card, and was surprised to find that they had meant $250, not $2.50. Feeling tricked, she sent the recipe to everyone she knew so that no one else would have to pay for it. The recipe is far reaching, and included in many family recipe collections, so though the company denies that the event ever happened, the effect is the same as if it had.

The famous recipe goes something like this:

**Mrs. Fields Cookie (FA 01 1143)**

Cream together:

- 2 C butter
- 2 C sugar
- 2 C brown sugar

Add:

- 4 eggs
- 2 tsp. vanilla

Mix together:

- 4 C flour
- 5 C oatmeal (blend into a powder)
Mix all the ingredients together and add a 24 oz. bag of chocolate chips, one 8 oz. Hershey bar (grated), and/or 3 cups of chopped nuts. Bake on an ungreased cookie sheet. Bake golf ball-sized cookies, placed 2 inches apart at 375 for 11 minutes.

This is a $250.00 recipe; give it to everyone.

There are a few other stories, including the Waldorf Red Velvet Cake recipe, a fudge recipe, and a forbidden coca cola recipe. None of them have any evidence of having actually been bought originally, but they are quite widespread and fairly good recipes all the same.

**Anecdotal Recipes (FA 01 1606)**

Recipes are a great way of starting traditions among family and friends, because when something is well liked enough to share, the story gets passed along with the recipes.

In one family, a story book in her kindergarten class inspired their five year old daughter to plant lollipop sticks in the family garden. She tended them with loving care, watering and weeding them faithfully for months, unconcerned that they didn’t appear to be growing. On Valentine’s Day, a perfectly acceptable time for growing things in Southern California, her parents built a Lollipop Tree out of a dead tree that they hot glued hundreds of lollipops to.

The girls were so delighted that the parents continued the practice year after year, a delight and reward for hard work in the garden. The mother of the family continued the tradition with her Kindergarteners, with a felt tree stuck to the wall of her classroom. The daughters of the family, full grown, planned to carry it out with their families someday, but won’t practice the tradition with roommates, because their roommates don’t belief in the magic.

**Traditional Eating: Some Recipes of the Gene Puckett Family (FA 01 1683)**

“As eating is so intimately associated with the family unit, eating together often implies a kind of kinship... securing food and eating together does entail an intensifying of communication and an increase of the rate of interaction found in no other act repeated so constantly” (Margaret Cussler)

Eating, for most folklore groups, is about much more than simply fixing the problem of hunger. Eating is done in intimate groups, and the atmosphere of the area where food is eaten is significant
to the relationship of the group. Recipes represent an entire range of customs, habits, traditions and taboos about food. Words that families say as they cook, what food is saved for special occasions and what is for every day, all are minute bits of family history.

Some great family traditions with food come from the time in the family’s history when they were the poorest. Things they once did to cut corners are remembered with affection, and recreated in their times of plenty.

**Material Lore (FA 16 6.1-6.3)**

The recipes in Material Lore are mostly desserts. Complex puddings, cakes, and cookies are saved from ancestral cooks and passed down for generations. While a few dinner recipes were included, for the most part, the portion of heritage that was instinctively passed on was the sweet portion. Things like Christmas cookies coming from Denmark, Switzerland or Hungary in inexact recipes as copied by a competent grandmother’s instinctual measurements are painstakingly written out and filed away.

Families have little instinct for saving the mundane, every day recipes that are common among friends and neighbors. Instead, they cling to that which makes their own family unique.

**Klejner (Danish Christmas Cookies) (FA 16 6.1.1.23.1)**

3 eggs  
1 C sugar  
½ tsp. salt  
4 T cream  
½ C butter  
1 tsp. Baking Powder  
3-4 C flour  
1 tsp. vanilla or cardamom  
1 ½ lb. shortening (for frying)

Beat eggs and sugar. Add cream and cool, melted butter. Mix dry ingredients and stir them into the eggs and butter mixture until it's a stiff batter. Roll out the batter to ¼” thickness and cut into diamond shapes. Cut a slit into the middle of each diamond and twist one of the pointed ends through it. Deep fat fry 6-8 cookies at a time until brown. Drain on paper.

**Bird’s Milk (Floating Islands) (FA 16 6.2.1.4.1)**

1 qt. Milk  
6 eggs  
9 T sugar
1 T vanilla (1 stick)

Bring milk to a boil while whipping the 6 egg whites until stiff. Add 3 T of sugar to the merengue and whip some more. Drop spoons of merengue into the hot milk and cook approx. 2 minutes on each side. Then remove them into a large bowl.

Beat egg yolks with 6 T sugar until smooth. Pour into the milk with vanilla and cook the resulting mixture for 2-5 minutes. Pour the mixture over the egg whites, chill and serve.