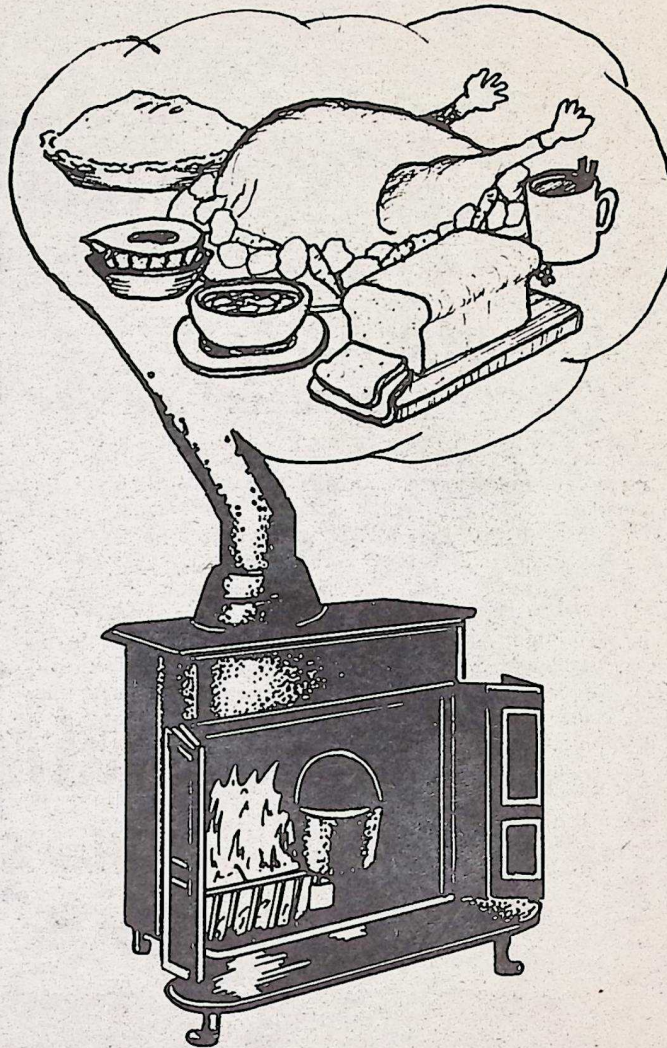


From Aunt Olivia's Kitchen

Cape Cod cooking - pioneer style

by Lydia Lovell



While sitting at the kitchen table the other evening, looking through some of the many recipes Aunt Olivia collected and passed down to younger generations, I couldn't help comparing modern cooking methods and equipment with those she was limited to using. In some ways, it's amazing she was able to turn out so much good food without electric beaters, frying pans, toasters, crepe pans, crock pots, electric or gas burners, broilers, and ovens. Let alone, a microwave oven.

Her cast iron kitchen coal stove was the sole source of heat. It sat on one wall of the kitchen like an enormous fat black cat, radiating heat summer and winter. The sound of the fire burning might even be compared to a cat's contented purr. From its oven came breads, cakes, pies, muffins, cookies, puddings, roasts, meat loaves, and a variety of casseroles. From its surface came stews, soups, chowders, cooked vegetables, sauces, cereals, jellies and preserves. The stove had no broiler.

Her icebox in the back entry was her sole source of refrigeration in warm weather. In it were kept milk, butter, eggs, cheese, meats and fish for tomorrow's meals, and a big chunk of ice was delivered twice a week. There, too, were stored fresh vegetables that might wilt if left in the pantry. Her pantry shelves held two complete sets of china: ordinary dishes used every day, and her "best" china that she set out only for holidays or company dinners. Additionally, on the shelves stood three or four dozen goblets, glasses, and jars; some were good crystal, some had originally held peanut butter. Depending upon the occasion, she chose from among them to set the table appropriately. Behind the pantry door, metal bins under the shelves kept flour, corn meal, and sugar supplies.

In the unheated cellar were stored foodstuffs processed each fall from garden harvests. And into the cellar every autumn went a barrel of apples, baskets of potatoes, and sacks of onions; from its beams hung dried herbs.

A kitchen closet next to the chimney provided space for heavy iron skillets Aunt Olivia used for frying, the enamelware double boiler, a coffee pot, several sizes of saucepans, a steam kettle, tin cake pans and pie plates, sieves and colanders, and a miscellany of measuring containers.

On the table where I sat reading recipes lay a copy of the recently-published "What's Cooking on Cape Cod?" by Marion Vuilleumier and Anita Buddington; the cookbook contains more than 400 recipes ranging from appetizers to vegetables. Thumbing through its 220 pages and thinking of Aunt Olivia, my mind turned back the pages of time even further, to days earlier than hers, to days when the first white settlers established their plantation on the shores of Barnstable Harbor in 1639.

How many recipes in "What's Cooking on Cape Cod?" might have been used by the housewives who cooked at open hearths and baked in beehive ovens built into their central chimneys in the small frame houses roofed with thatch from the marshes?

Turning to the index, I found **Canterbury Cheese Pie**; the title reminded me of Canterbury, in England's Kent County. Could this recipe be older than Barnstable? A goodwife might have substituted, in some instances, but could have prepared a reasonable facsimile. It sounds so delicious I want to share it anyhow:

Ingredients:

18 Graham crackers, crushed, combined with
1/2 lb. margarine, melted (a pioneer would have used
fresh-churned butter)
1/3 cup sugar
1/2 tsp. cinnamon
Mix well and line a 10" pie plate, saving 1/2 cup for top.

Filling:

1 1/2 Pkgs. (large) cream cheese (available to early settlers?)
1/2 cup sugar
3 eggs (perhaps wild bird's eggs, if the hens weren't laying)
1 1/2 tbsp. rum (or 1 tbsp. rum extract-rum was a staple)
Add well-beaten eggs to softened cream cheese, stir in sugar and rum; pour into crust. Bake 20 minutes at 375°. Remove and cover with topping.

Topping:

1 cup sour cream (fresh heavy cream, beaten, could be used)
3 tbsp. sugar
1 tbsp. rum or rum flavoring
Spread over filling, sprinkle with remaining crumb mixture, bake 5 more minutes. Chill thoroughly.

The index led me to page 134 and **Clam and Corn Bake** recipe, chosen because clams and corn were staples for early settlers at Barnstable. A pioneer woman would have had no canned goods, but could easily adapt this recipe to fresh supplies, stored much the same way Aunt Olivia's were.

Ingredients:

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| 2 eggs | 3 tbsp. butter, melted |
| 1 cup milk | 2 tbsp. onions, minced |
| 1 1/2 cup soda crackers, crushed | 1 tbsp. green pepper |
| 1 7-oz can minced clams (not drained) | 1 tsp. salt |
| 1 can corn (cream style) | 1/2 cup grated cheese |

Beat eggs, add milk and crackers. Let stand to soften crackers. Add clams and rest of ingredients except cheese. Put in

greased 1 1/2 quart casserole and bake 50 minutes at 350° until firm. Sprinkle with cheese and bake 5 minutes longer until cheese is melted.

Crabs, like clams, were plentiful in the marshes and harbor waters. **Crab Casserole** would have been a natural.

Saute in 3 tbsp melted butter: 1 1/2 tsp. minced onion and 2 tbsp. chopped green pepper.

Stir in:

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| 2 tbsp. flour | 1/2 cup mushrooms |
| 1 tsp. salt | 2 cups light cream |
| 2 eggs, well beaten | 1/4 tsp. dry mustard |

3 cups shredded crabmeat

Mix together, put in greased

Mix together, put in greased casserole, and top with buttered crumbs. Bake at 375° for 40 minutes. Serves 4 to 6.

And lobsters, like crabs and clams, were harvested by Indians and settlers alike. Perhaps a housewife taught an Indian woman to make **Lobster Pie**.

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| 2 tbsp. butter | 1 tbsp. flour |
| 1/4 cup sherry wine | 3/4 cup light cream |
| 1 cup cooked lobster meat | 2 egg yolks |

3 tbsp. butter

Melt 2 tbsp. butter, add sherry wine, and boil 1 minute. Add lobster and let stand. Melt 3 tbsp butter in top of double boiler over direct heat. Add flour and stir until it bubbles one minute. Remove from heat. Slowly stir in cream and wine, drained from lobster. Place over hot water and cook, stirring constantly until sauce is smooth and thickened. Remove from heat. To beaten egg yolks add sauce slowly, a little at a time while beating; mix well. Cook over hot water (not boiling) for about 3 minutes. Keep stirring. Remove from heat and add lobster meat. Turn into casserole and sprinkle with topping. Bake in 325° oven about 10 minutes.

Topping:

Mix together:

1/2 cup cracker meal
1 tbsp. potato chips crushed (this ingredient would not have been used by a pioneer housewife!)
1/4 tsp. paprika
1 1/2 tsp. Parmesan cheese (nor would this one, but a substitute might have been)

Add 2 tbsp. melted butter. Mix well and sprinkle over pie.

The Lobster Pie recipe is attributed to Rose Pena; she suggests it makes a good luncheon or supper dish served with a green vegetable and tossed salad.

Finally, there is **Cranberry Chutney**.

Boil together 2 cups of water and 2 cups of sugar.

Add all at once:

1 lb. washed cranberries
1/4 cup cider vinegar
1 cup seedless muscat raisins (maybe wild Concord grapes, skinned and seeded?)
2 tbsp. light brown sugar (perhaps molasses)
1/2 tsp. ginger, ground (optional)
1/2 tsp. salt

Simmer 10 minutes; serve hot or cold with poultry or meat.

Aunt Olivia would have found "What's Cooking on Cape Cod?" a source of many a good meal. Her own collection includes some recipes quite similar to these; differences lie, in some cases, only in proportions or spices and flavorings. Of special value to anyone preparing meals for large numbers of people, the cookbook includes numerous recipes for quantity cookery, and even if you may never need to serve 50 or 100 people, it's a good feeling to realize that you would know how to plan should the occasion arise.

If the Lovells ever have a family reunion, this book will prove invaluable to the committee charged with serving meals.