

Culinary Inspiration from the 18th Century

As the COVID pandemic has sent many of us into our kitchens and gardens to fill our days, here in historic Odessa, we can look to the past for culinary inspiration. The housewives, cooks and caterers of colonial times used ingenuity and determination to take the new foods found here along with plants and recipes brought from their European, African and Caribbean homelands to transform them into tempting and nourishing dishes. Luckily, we are blessed with all the modern conveniences of our 21st century kitchens while our ancestors were busy from morning until night taking care of their families, households or businesses in front of a working hearth or bake oven.

Markets in the Odessa area offered a tempting variety of foods—the Delmarva peninsula was rich with seafood and waterfowl, local farmers planted a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, dense forests abounded with wild game and local ports made the importation of fruits, wines and exotic spices possible. Family, religious, social and economic ties with Philadelphia and Baltimore exposed families to the sophisticated tables of relatives, friends and business associates in whose homes they were frequent visitors. Slaves and free black communities widened the flavor of local cuisine to include African and Caribbean influences.



A presentation of how our ancestors baked foods in their kitchens

The Assignment

Today, as many of us turn to baking and cooking as a respite from the daily news cycle, we can blend the timelessness of 18th century culinary traditions and the convenience of our modern kitchens to create mouth-watering dishes that originated hundreds of years ago. The Historic Odessa Foundation invites you to tie on your apron and try two of our most popular summertime dishes: “Gaspacha” and “Appoquinimink Cakes” from *The Virginia Housewife*, written by Mary Randolph and published in 1824.

This compendium of recipes she gathered from all over the Delmarva area was one of the most popular early cookbooks in America. Although the recipes are given in their original form, they are annotated for your convenience.

Gaspacha - The Virginia Housewife, Mary Randolph, 1824

- Put some soft biscuit or toasted bread in the bottom of a salad bowl
- Put in a layer of sliced tomatas with the skin taken off, and one of the sliced cucumbers, sprinkled with pepper, salt, and chopped onion
- Do this until the bowl is full, stew some tomatas quite soft, strain the juice, mix in some (dry) mustard (to taste) and oil, and pour over it

Appoquinimink Cakes - The Virginia Housewife, Mary Randolph, 1824

- Put a little salt (about a ¼ teaspoon), one beaten egg, four ounces of butter, four cups of flour—make it into a paste with new milk (cream-add enough to form a dough that does not stick to your hands)
- eat it with a pestle for half an hour (about 10 minutes in a mixer fitted with a dough hook)
- Roll the paste thin (it will be elastic) and cut it into round cakes (use a round cookie or biscuit cutter)
- Bake them on a gridiron (an ungreased frying pan set on medium heat) and be careful not to burn them

These cakes-or-crackers are thought to be the precursor to the eastern shore beaten biscuit. You can top them off with coarse salt, poppy or sesame seeds to punch up the flavor.

From Our Collection



Salamander

A salamander, in the 18th century, was a utensil that resembled a salamander's tail.

It was heated and passed over sugary desserts to create a glaze. Today, they are large broilers used in commercial kitchens.

Show off your baking skills! Take a video or picture of your baking process and post it with the hashtag **#historyathome**.

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