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Cookin’ for Thanksgivin’

By Clare Pell

"Ah! On Thanksgiving day, when from East and West, From North and from South come the Pilgrim and guest, When the gray-haired New Englander sees round his board The old broken links of affection restored, When the care-wearied man seeks his mother once more, And the worn matron smiles where the girl smiled before, What moistens the lip and what brightens the eye? What calls back the past, like the rich pumpkin pie?"

As THE well worn clock of Father Time strikes off the hours on this Thanksgiving Day, we shall be busily dashing around stuffing the turkey, a fat, well fed young fowl; rolling out our hot cross buns, and baking Thanksgiving pumpkin pies, 'cause "Thanksgiving ain't Thanksgiving without pumpkin pie." Let's look back a few generations and watch our great-great-great-grandparents preparing for Thanksgiving, the feast day of the year in America.

Back in a little New England community nestled in those lovely hills and the verdantly rich farm lands, we see an immaculate white house sheltered by the stately elms, silver birches and majestic maples. Opening the door we are welcomed by a big fire blazing and crackling in the hearth, and before us is the table heaped high with palate tickling dishes that are New England's own.

Over near the fire place is the mother baking, probably, in Dutch ovens of tin, set on the blazing hearth, facing the open fire, with a tin shield to ward off the flames; or in an iron kettle oven with squat legs and a depression on the cover in which hot coals would be placed to give a top heat to brown the dough, or rather the doughy batter, which was put in a tin pan to keep it clean and set inside the little oven to bake.

Could you make a delicious cake in a vessel like that? Possibly, but what if your recipe read like this? "To make excellent spice cakes, take halfe a pecke of very fine wheat-flower, take almost one pound of sweet butter and some good milke and creame mixt together, and set it on the fire, and a good deale of sugar, and let it melt together; then straine Saffron into your milke a good quantity; then take seven or eight spoonful of good Ale barme, and eight egges with two yelkes and mix them together, then put your milke to it when it is somewhat cold, and into your flower put salt, Aniseedes bruised, Cloves and Mace, and a good deal of Cinamon; then worke all together good and stiffe, that you may need not worke in any flower after; then put in a little rose water cold, then rub it well in the thing you knead it in, and worke it thoroughly: If it be not sweet enough, scrape in a little more sugar, and pull it all in pices, and hurle in a good quantity of Currants, and so worke all together againe, and bake you Cake as you see cause in a gentle warme oven."

This receipt was printed 200 years ago in Country Contentments: or the English House Wife by G. M.—London, 1623.

And what could Thanksgiving dinner be without a pumpkin pie? No more complete than Washington's birthday without the hatchet, Easter without the bunny, or Hallowe'en without black cats.

Told in the words of our grandmothers, here is the "true" Down East Punkin Pie receipt.

"First an' foremost, use unslated butter to your pastry, make the gunlock or border high 'nough for generous fillin', which shrinks in bakin'. Don't scrimp a blessed thing. 1½ cup strained pumpkin, ¼ cup brown sugar or 3 tablespoons molasses—to give dark color, 1 teaspoon cinnamon, ½ teaspoon ginger, ½ teaspoon salt, two eggs well beaten, 1½ cup milk, ½ cup cream, at discretion for richness of flavor. Stir in the ingredients in order given above. Don't scrimp the quantity of filling—it shrinks in baking.

Like all folks what love cookin', to add personality to the ingredients; a pinch more o' cinnamon, a dite less somethin' else, makes all the diff-runce in the world 'twixt 'punkin' pie and 'pumpkin' pie."

As this Thanksgiving season approaches, let us pause a moment, as we bake in our electric ovens, make dessert in our mechanical refrigerators, use the mechanical mixers, and cook with all the approved and tested recipes, and offer a little prayer of thankfulness for our New England forefathers who began the culinary excellences of Thanksgiving Day that is renowned throughout the world.

And lest we forget Him who makes all things possible—

"Let all of us in full accord
Give grateful thanks unto the Lord—
A very kind and gracious Lord,
Who gives us more than our reward."