

WHAT PEOPLE ATE IN 1814

written by:
Kate Besaw
Julie Layne
Donna Coughlin

What did people eat in 1814 in the North Country area? People would have eaten what they could gather, grow, hunt or fish. The indigenous people taught the Europeans about the three sisters (corn, beans, and squash) and prevented starvation for the early European settlers. People may have had pigs, lambs, cows, and chickens. They could hunt deer, turkey, squirrels, rabbits, woodchucks.

Those with English ancestors remembered many recipes for syllabub, Cornish pasties and other meat pies, plum puddings and English trifle, tea cakes and shepherd's pie.

Fish would have been plentiful and easy to catch from streams and lakes. They could be cooked and preserved by drying. Lobsters and clams were available. Clam pie was popular, also scalloped oysters.

Succotash made from fresh corn and lima beans or other beans was a staple, as well as red flannel hash made from beef, onions, and potatoes.

Breads included corn bread, muffins and rolls, gingerbread, Sally Lunn squares, biscuits, brown bread, pumpkin bread and griddle cakes, tea cakes and pancakes were made for breakfasts.

Desserts included apple, blueberry, elderberry, and other fruit pies, plus yam and pumpkin pies. Indian corn pudding, plum and cranberry pudding, fruit tarts and trifle were made. Strawberry and blueberry shortcake were popular in season.

Preserving meat meant smoking, drying, or salting. Vegetables could have been kept in root cellars or pickled.

After a long winter, with no fresh vegetables, it must have been a joy to go out into the woods and along the streams to look for fresh greens. In spring, people could gather cowslips by streams and fiddle heads in the woods. Beware some ferns are poisonous! Stinging nettles may have been used in baked goods, as well as a green vegetable or a tea. Young dandelion greens were also welcome after the long winter without fresh vegetables. The blossoms could also be fried.

In Spring, corn could be planted. Once the corn was about 4 inches tall, the beans seeds were planted three bean seeds in each corn mound. Squash was planted in mounds between each corn/bean mound.

In Summer, gardens would have provided fresh vegetables such as beans, beets, potatoes, and corn. Wild berries could be gathered, such as cranberries, blueberries, and elderberries.

Fall would be harvest time. A time to pick apples, plums, and pears and harvest pumpkins and other squash.

Winter meant relying on vegetables and fruits that could be dried or stored in root cellars: squash, potatoes, apples. For the farmers and their families, there was no need to go hungry. Their whole year was spent in preparation, planting, harvesting, and enjoying food from their farms. Hunting and fishing provided protein and could be dried, smoked or salted to preserve.

Plattsburgh was a busy port on Lake Champlain, which was the superhighway of its time. Many goods, including food and spices, were available to the people of Plattsburgh in greater quantities than for more inland towns and cities. The advertisements that Henry Delord put in the local papers for his store show just how much diversity people had access to for food and drink.