

The Founding Foodies: How Washington, Jefferson, and Franklin Revolutionized American Cuisine

Dave DeWitt

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Offering a new perspective on America's food culture, Dave DeWitt's *The Founding Foodies* explores the food "scene" of the early United States, mixing recipes and images with a studied history of colonial Americans' farming and trading practices. DeWitt focuses his attention on the Founding Fathers, highlighting their love of cooking and farming. "Today," he writes, "the Founding Fathers would be superstars of sustainable farming and ranching, exotic imported foods, brewing...they would be foodies." Foodies, a term coined in the 1980s to describe culinary-curious cooks and eaters, takes on a new and compelling definition as it's applied to those eating and cooking in times of war, famine, and social turmoil. This re-imagining broadens the appeal of *The Founding Foodies*—American historians and savvy cooks alike will find research and commentary of interest in this text.

The myriad cultures that shaped colonial America—Native American, East Indian, British, Parisian—each helped to define today's dinner plate. DeWitt examines each in depth, noting how staples like corn and indulgences like ice cream became commonplace American foods. Thanksgiving, a singularly American holiday based on a shared meal, also appears in *The Founding Foodies*, and DeWitt notes both myth and researched fact in his writings on the holiday. He moves chronologically through America's first centuries with careful details and an open, conversational voice, situating his research accessibly alongside a background overview of early American history.

For those foodies interested in trying a hand at Washington's "rumpe" of beef or Jefferson's *blancmanger* mold, DeWitt includes thirty-plus recipes in *The Founding Foodies*. Cocktail lists and brewing tips accompany the food recipes, as DeWitt notes that "[c]olonists drank twice as much as Americans do now." Among these recipes, we find traditionally conceived American fare—popcorn, baked beans, apple pie—as well as dishes influenced by French, Caribbean, and Cajun cultures, like chicken curry and New Orleans dirty rice. All appear faithfully maintained in the era's vernacular, preserving the recipes' historical and cultural contexts.

Part cookbook, part formative examination, *The Founding Foodies* importantly shows the origins of the American food lover. Far from a contemporary creature, the foodie helped to make America: the products of his tastes, his wars, and his imports all appear in force in today's American diet. DeWitt delivers a book that teaches new foodies about their roots, and shows American history buffs a new portion of our nation's first hundreds of years.

RACHEL MENNIES (November / December 2010)

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