

Christmas Dinner...1790

You're setting down to a Christmas dinner and your eyes move appreciatively across the table and survey the feast about to begin. You sip a fine Madeira from your crystal goblet and smile as you anticipate the taste of some of your favorite dishes. The mutton chops look particularly good and will be a hard choice next to the boiled rockfish...maybe you'll have a little of both! Your hostess makes a terrific hominy pudding and loves to set her table with other great treats like Chess tarts, pickled cantaloupe, spiced peaches in brandy, baked celery with slivered almonds and oysters on the half shell.

No, you're not dining in another country. You're dining in another century right here in the United States. Specifically, you're dining at Mount Vernon and your hostess is Martha Washington. The year is 1790 A.D.

My real love of history hit me long after finishing high school and college. I suppose reading about it when you don't have to makes a difference and one of the most interesting aspects of history is lifestyle information. These are the tidbits of information that humanize figures from the past. For me it really doesn't matter if they were famous historical figures or my own great, great, great grandparents. It's really neat to understand the more intimate parts of their day-to-day lives.

One great source for historical dining info is *The Williamsburg Cookbook*, which was compiled by Letha Booth and the staff at Colonial Williamsburg. It takes you back to the times of our forefathers and what graced their tables. Some of the treats listed as Christmas fare based on their research include wassail, a spiced fruit punch made with cider, cranberry juice, orange juice and lemon juice, cheese wafers, Williamsburg Inn chilled crab gumbo, King's Arms Tavern creamed celery with pecans, hearts of lettuce with Russian dressing and eggnog pie.

It should come as no surprise that many of these recipes were fairly exotic by historical standards and very labor intensive to make. Remember that this was an era in which dining held a special place in even the most humble home. I can only imagine just how much more important it would be to us if you got rid of all the televisions, radios, video games and phones for one evening. And remember there were no super markets to secure the many ingredients used in making your creations. Its no wonder that dinner was an event and special dinners required extensive planning and preparations.

This month we offer our traditional holiday event through the Winedog Feast Series now being held at the Historic General Denver Hotel in Wilmington. Our Celtic Christmas Festivals includes recipes from England which in turn became some of the first traditional holiday dishes of the American Colonies.

One dish that has prompted numerous requests for a recipe is our English Trifle dessert. This recipe in its original form has been around for centuries and although we have made some practical adjustments, it still captures the spirit of the dessert made in the 1700's.

You really should have a go at it this Christmas!

Winedog's English Trifle

Use a large clear glass bowl...you can easily find trifle bowls at discount stores in the kitchen section.

12 cups of egg custard
3 small loaves of pound cake sliced in ½ inch thick slices
5 cups fresh or frozen berries (blackberries, raspberries, blue berries and strawberries)
1 ½ cups good quality cream sherry
6 cups whipped cream

Cover the bottom of your bowl with a layer of pound cake. Carefully drizzle 1/3 of your sherry into pound cake. Add 4 cups of egg custard over pound cake and smooth out evenly. Cover custard with 2 cups fruit and top with 2 cups of whipped cream. Repeat this layer arrangement a second time exactly like the first series of layers. Finally add a third layer of pound cake with sherry, topped with egg custard and whipped cream with the last cup of fruit being placed on top of the whipped cream as a colorful garnish.

This dessert is best when it is made at least 4 hours or even the night before and refrigerated to allow the flavors to marry properly before being served. Should serve 8.

I would remind you that it is fun to “customize” your trifle based on your personal tastes. I've heard of people substituting Kahlua or Amaretto for the sherry, adding crushed pecans in the fruit layers, or adjusting the whole dessert to a lowfat version with vanilla lowfat pudding instead of custard and no fat dream whip in place of the whipped cream. Remember...”you're the boss in your kitchen.”

Holiday Wine Recommendations

If you're like most you'll be using ham or turkey in some form during the holidays and let me suggest that you open up a great Riesling this season and see if it doesn't disappear twice as fast as your Chardonnay during the meal.

Riesling is not an easy grape to grow and that very well may be the reason it has such wonderful personality and unique styling. A good one will have a lean crisp snap to the flavor, perhaps some green apple characteristic and a finish which is clean and packed full of refreshing citrus flavors. They can vary in sweetness and therefore offer a style that should match up well to your own personal needs.

A great German Kabinett or Spatlese is almost always a safe selection along with some of the better dry Rieslings of Alsace. The best ones are not cheap! Some of the great ones will cost you \$25 and up per bottle, however there is sure to be one that fits your budget comfort area.

Our "Best of Category" selections include: the 2000 Van Volxem Scharzhofberger Spätlese, the Gysler 2003 Weinheimer Riesling Kabinett, the 2000 Schloss Vollrads Rheingau Riesling Qualitätswein, and the Alsatian 2001 Domaine Riefle Rouffach Riesling.

Good hunting and call if you need help locating some of these delightful white wines. Someone once told me that the Vikings drank Riesling wines so they're certainly not for wimps! Call if you would like assistance at 888-288-0668.