



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

Dave DeWitt

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Who Were the Original Foodies?

Beyond their legacy as revolutionaries and politicians, the Founding Fathers of America were first and foremost a group of farmers. Passionate about the land and the bounty it produced, their love of food and the art of eating created what would ultimately become America's diverse food culture.

Like many of today's foodies, the Founding Fathers were ardent supporters of sustainable farming and ranching, exotic imported foods, brewing, distilling, and wine appreciation. Washington, Jefferson, and Franklin penned original recipes, encouraged local production of beer and wine, and shared their delight in food with friends and fellow politicians.

In *The Founding Foodies*, food writer Dave DeWitt entertainingly describes how some of America's most famous colonial leaders not only established America's political destiny, but also revolutionized the very foods we eat.

Features over thirty authentic colonial recipes, including:

Thomas Jefferson's ice cream A recipe for beer by George Washington Martha Washington's fruitcake
Medford rum punch Terrapin soup

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

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David Kopec says

Interesting, Great Anecdotes

After reading this book, I certainly have a much firmer understanding of the culinary history of the United States. The author is a good story teller. His many historical, cultural, and culinary anecdotes are fun, interesting, and insightful.

The material gives a sense of historical place for America's cuisine. Did you know just how old our barbecue tradition is? Or, that cider was once more prevalent than beer in some parts of the country? These are the sorts of tidbits that make this book fascinating - if they don't fascinate you, then you would only get the story telling about the founding fathers out of it. If the founding fathers don't fascinate you, then don't read this book.

My only complaint is with the book's brevity. It's a quick read, which on the one hand makes it great for casual carousing, but on the other hand I felt there was so much more that could've been covered.

Julieann Wielga says

Jefferson and Franklin traveled widely travelld widely in Europe. They brought home ideas about unusual foods. Jefferson was a gardener and fascinated by the science of plants. He tried many non-native plants in america such as Olive Trees. He was a huge fan of wine. He had his half brother-in-law, James Hemmings, as his cook in Paris. James become a honored Parisian cook and brought the knowledge of how to make these delicassies, sauses to America. Jefferson as governor and president hosted generous dinner parties as part of his role as politicaid. Washington traveled less, but was a tremendous farmer. He experimented with different crops as to which would give the greatest profit. He made mills to grind the grain....

A small aside was how the author dealt with the question of what both Washington and Jefferson did with their cooks. Washington's well known and accomplished chef ----Washington escaped from the plantation, and to Washington's dismay was never heard from again. Jefferson's cook James, returned to slave status when he returned to America with Jefferson. He eventually became an alcoholic and committed suicide.

Nini Villanova says

OK, this book was VERY interesting, but it was poorly written, and I would venture to say questionably researched. The author seems to have done his primary research on wikipedia and then backed himself up by doing follow-up research afterwards. In addition to poor research, the author begins chronologically, but then begins jumping around as the book continued. I do want to play around with the recipes, which look

interesting and worth a try (do I smell a dinner party coming up?)

Fang McGee says

Delightful; warning: do not read on an empty stomach.

Rebecca says

I found this book to be very badly organized and very chaotically written. The facts about American cuisine were interesting but DeWitt likes (rightly so I think) to contextualize changes in food and agricultural practices with the political and social scene at the time and he gets A LOT of basic facts wrong. Nothing that seems major to the larger story he's telling but it certainly bothered me and it calls into question his research skills. I was not very impressed by this book.

Megan says

The historical part of this book (the vast majority of it) was fascinating. I found the recipes included at the end underwhelming, but I might also be spoiled by the James Townsends & Son Youtube channel which has amazing videos about accurately recreating food from this time period. I wouldn't go to this book if you're looking to cook, but if you want a great historical read on how a number of folks shaped America's food history, this is it. The writing was easy-to-read and engaging.

Lindsey Duncan says

An entertaining look at the early history of food in America and the Founding Fathers who were greatly influential in its development, this book was full of delightful information. The period recipes, presented verbatim, are fun to read - and definitely give you an appreciation for modern cookbooks, because I would hate to try to follow one. Be aware that book is perhaps mistitled; the first segment of it (a significant portion of the book) is not so much about founding foodies as it is about the early economy, necessity and evolution of food, from the explosion of the pepper trade in Salem to the duties of the baker-general of George Washington's army.

This is not a general history book - it is an in-depth analysis of American eating, and includes a lot of elements we often take for granted nowadays, such as the requirements imposed by geography and the creation of a national identity. The chapters that focus specifically on Washington and Jefferson are really well-balanced, providing a general sense of their lives and historical high-points, while keeping the focus on the real star on the story: the cuisine.

For me, where this book falls down is the translation of recipes at the end of the book. The author has attempted to modernize the recipes, but the result seems half-hearted at best, both in the product and the methodology used to arrive at these interpretations. To be honest, I would have been perfectly content - might have even enjoyed it better - to have another few chapters, looking at some of the other early

culinarians, rather than the recipes. This kind of a project really requires an entire book to itself - perhaps even for each individual region (for instance, New England fare versus Jefferson's Virginia), never mind the whole Revolutionary landscape; it's not really suited to be squashed into 46 pages.

Still, as a reading book rather than a recipe book, highly recommended. If you love the story behind the food, this is for you.

Apryl Anderson says

Interesting survey of colonial American agriculture and culinary habits. It makes me want to visit each of the historic homes for more in-depth study, and I celebrate the American living-museum culture! I've found the curators to be so engaged and engaging—something that few European curators seem to have mastered, although that's happily changing away from traditional Ivory Tower lordship of knowledge.

The recipes presented are also an overview of the wealth that is available to those who google. Project Gutenberg, for instance, offers...oh look, it's lunchtime!

Matthew McDonough says

A brilliantly fresh take on some historical figures that likely seem old and dusty to so many. When I was dreaming of becoming a history teacher, this book inspired me to think outside the box in regard to creating a cross-curriculum program to help bring history to life.

Dorrit says

The Founding Foodies is one part history, one part cookbook, one part travel guide, and one part bibliography. Unfortunately it does none of them well (ok - to be fair, I didn't read the bibliography carefully - maybe it does that well). The history section rambles somewhat incoherently and tries to cover far too many people for the brief space making it hard to grasp much about the topic. The cookbook section presents a collection of modernized recipes for colonial dishes. It is roughly as coherent as the history section and the recipes are poorly written. The travel guide section is, perhaps, the best of the three. It does, at least, present an intelligible list of key colonial sites which might be of interest to people interested in food. All in all, you can probably do better.

Casey Wheeler says

I came across this book in the gift shop of the National Archives during our recent trip to Washington, DC. It intrigued me as I am now in the food banking world and I am a history buff.

The subtitle of the book, "How Washington, Jefferson and Franklin Revolutionized American Cuisine", pretty well summarizes what the book is about. The author focused much more on Washington and Jefferson than Franklin as they both were also experimental farmers whereas Franklin was not.

The book is filled with colonial recipes for all types of food and drink. DeWitt starts with the early English settlements and moves through Jefferson's lifespan. I found it interesting the role that pigs (hogs), cod, salt and pepper all played in the development of food in our country along with assisting a flourishing economy at that time.

The book is a quick read and interesting from a "foodie" point of view. I recommend it to anyone who has an interest in early american history and what types of food they ate and how it was prepared.

Erik says

Interesting look at early food and drink in America but a bit rambling at times.

Christina says

This book could have benefitted from some stronger organization- at times it read like a first draft, and the story skipped around a bit. That being said, I thought this was an enjoyable read and I learned a lot about the Founding Fathers and their food habits. I always find culinary histories to be incredibly interesting (my all time favorite is still *A Square Meal: A Culinary History of the Great Depression*) and I never knew about most of what this book covers, like Jefferson's numerous attempts to grow European varietals of wine or the lavish, extensive dinner parties the Washingtons threw at Mount Vernon. I appreciated that the author included a lot of original recipes from the period, too, and modernized a good amount to make them a bit easier for readers to make.

Emily says

This started out with the promise of being a good, if not great, food anthropology of early America. Not well written, but maintained by a subject of interest to me and providing expansion on things I had already studied. Unfortunately it turned into a complete breakdown of disorganization and repetition. Just when I reached the point where I felt I could no longer continue I happily discovered that the last 125 pages are recipes, bibliography, travel recommendations (do you really need to tell someone that would buy this book they should visit Monticello?) and index. Thank goodness, because the idea of forcing my way through even 50 more pages of DeWitts writing just made me want to stick the thing on a shelf somewhere, perhaps as a reference for the next time I wanted authentic grog. If this hadn't been engaging, despite the poor writing for the first 2 chapters it definitely would have only garnered 1 star. Although, had it not sucked me in for those first 60 pages, I doubt I would have continued for the next 100, and I don't review books I don't finish.

Coleen Dailey says

This book was an easy read and combined two things I really love - history and food. It reveals a lot about how certain foods became "american" as well as some historical background as to the why. No Jefferson did

not invent ice cream, but his recipe is included which makes the book all the more fun. There is also a listing of restaurants and places to visit. Of the five restaurants listed, I have eanted and 3 and loved each one. Enjoy or perhaps Bon appetit!
