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Cookies: A History Lesson

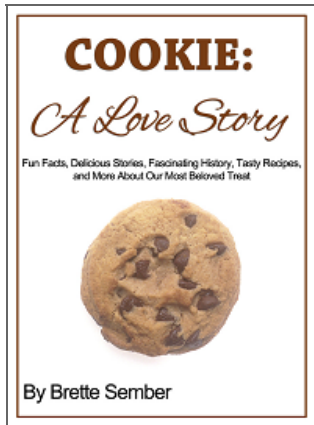
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Submitted by [MyKidsEatSquid](#) on Mon, 11/26/2012 - 15:18. [Recipes](#)

Do you have a list of your **favorite holiday cookies** that you just have to make come December? My kids and I always make a big batch of linzer cookies. Our kitchen table is literally covered with cookies by the time we're done filling each round with raspberry jam, then topping it with a cut-out cookie, before sprinkling it with powdered sugar. At last count, my recipe made 40 cookies! (That's the total of 80 cookie rounds, whew.)

Cookies have a long and sweet history that **Brette Sember** has detailed in her latest book ***Cookie: A Love Story: Fun Facts, Delicious Stories, Fascinating History, Tasty Recipes, and More***. Here, I asked her to share a little bit about how the modern cookie came about.



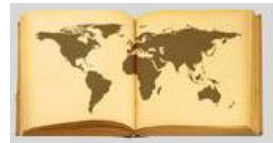
Do cookies have any prehistoric origins?

Cookies were most likely invented by early humans who mixed grains into a thick gruel and cooked it on hot rocks by the fire. Batter probably dropped on nearby rocks, creating early cookies. These cooked more quickly and were much smaller, making them just right for hungry children, something that is still a selling point to today. These early baked goods were eventually sweetened with berries, honey, or fruits, satisfying the inherent human craving for sweets.

What about other early civilizations—did they make cookies?

The Greeks baked with grain pastes until the 5th century BC and used honey to sweeten their baked goods, called boen. Romans began baking small honey cakes in 7th century BC, often in heart shapes for weddings. The Roman Empire had specialized pastry bakers who created biscotti.

What were the earliest cookies like?



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By about 1000 AD, European bread baking was something done in village ovens (to reduce the risk of fires in homes), but most people still cooked small cookies on their hearths. In Europe, baker's guilds were formed (requiring rigorous certification) and eventually bakeries became part of each village in the 1100s, restricting most baked goods to these professionals. The early cookies made here were called jumbles, early sugar cookies, sometimes twisted into the shape of a pretzel. By the 17th century laws were changed, allowing people to bake gingerbread at home during Christmas and Easter. Gingerbread became popular across Europe and in America.

When did the first "real" cookies come along?

Dessert baking exploded in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries among the wealthy and soon flour became less expensive and baking desserts reached the other classes. At the same time, colonists in America were learning to cook with new ingredients in a new land, applying the skills they learned in Europe to a new life. English, Dutch, and Scotch settlers made small cakes and shortbreads, often using molasses as a sweetener, creating thick cookies (to prevent burning when baked in Dutch ovens close to the fire). Jumbles are one of the earliest cookies made in America (Martha Washington included them in her cookbook).

How did modern cooking techniques, equipment, and ingredients change the way cookies are made?

Macaroons, jumbles, rolled gingerbread, and small tea cakes were the most prevalent early American cookies. But everything began to change in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Railroads meant ingredients were no longer local and people began to move around the country, sharing recipes. Home stoves evolved, making temperature control easier. Electricity became available and slowly spread, leading to electric ovens. The advent of refrigeration allowed butter and eggs to last longer.

Ingredients changed as well: white flour and sugar became common, making baking easier and causing cookies to become sweeter. The creaming technique became common, creating cookies that were flatter and softer – real cookies, as opposed to biscuit-style. Cookies were easy to make and more delicious than ever before.

Brette Sember's web site is www.BretteSember.com and she blogs at <http://PuttingItAllontheTable.com>.

Kristen J. Gough is the Global Cuisines & Kids Editor for Wandering Educators. She shares her family's adventurous food experiences--and recipes--at MyKidsEatSquid.com.

Feature photo of cookies do not always wish to remain stacked courtesy of flickr creative commons: flickr.com/photos/klara/403856634

Cookies: A History Lesson

Written by Kristen J Gough

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