

Culinary Revolutionaries

TASTE SOME HISTORY AT THE MILL AT ANSELMA

Liz Tarditi



The Mill at Anselma



in Chester Springs, visitors can still purchase dark-roasted cornmeal and stone-ground pastry flour produced using traditional methods. These ingredients offer a direct connection to the agricultural traditions that helped feed both the Brandywine Valley and the American cause.

Nearly three centuries later, a new generation of culinary revolutionaries keeps those traditions alive. Anselma's volunteers preserve the skills of water-powered milling while connecting visitors to local agriculture, history and exceptional food. As America approaches its 250th anniversary, these recipes offer more than a taste of history. They remind us that behind every great cause are ordinary people whose knowledge, labor and generosity help carry it forward.

AN ARMY MARCHES ON ITS stomach, the old adage goes, and during the Revolutionary War, the survival of the American cause depended on the skilled hands that fed it. In this month's Brandywine Table, we journey back to Valley Forge, where George Washington's troops endured one of the darkest winters in American history, and we meet Hannah Till, a pastry cook whose remarkable story became intertwined with the American Revolution.

But Till was not alone. Millers helped by transforming local grain into flour and meal. Bakers tended beehive ovens capable of producing 10,000 to 12,000 loaves of bread per day, while cooks stretched limited provisions into nourishing meals.

Oneida woman Polly Cooper helped save the starving Continental Army by introducing them to white corn and teaching soldiers the ancient Indigenous technique of nixtamalization — an ash-soaking process necessary to make the hard kernels digestible and unlock their nutritional value. Refusing any monetary payment for her aid, Cooper accepted only a black wool shawl from

Martha Washington, a legendary token of gratitude still treasured by the Oneida Nation as a symbol of alliance. Together, these ordinary people helped sustain a revolution.

The recipes that follow tell their story through food. Cornbread and hoecakes honor the corn that nourished soldiers and settlers alike. Officer's Table Chicken Pies reflect the more refined meals prepared for Washington, Lafayette and the army's leadership.

Hannah Till's Ginger Buttons celebrate the talented pastry cook who served at Valley Forge and later purchased her freedom. During the encampment, she and her husband Isaac welcomed a son, Isaac Worley Till. Her friendship with Lafayette endured long after the war, and when he returned to Philadelphia nearly 50 years later, he sought out "Aunt Hannah" and reportedly paid off her mortgage.

The grains themselves tell a story. Cornmeal sustained the rank and file, while fine pastry flour represented the height of colonial milling technology. The same grain that fed hungry soldiers could also appear on an officer's table as delicate cakes and pastries. At the [Mill at Anselma](#)

George Washington's Hoecakes

These are not our fluffy pancakes — they're historic hoecakes, born from Native American culinary heritage and baked over the open hearth. Hannah Till would have made these every morning at Valley Forge. They were a favorite breakfast enjoyed by George Washington. These rustic cornmeal discs pop visually when served warm with butter, honey and berries.



Serves 6

- ½ tsp. active dry yeast
- 2½ C. white cornmeal, divided
- 3–4 C. lukewarm water
- ½ tsp. salt
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- Melted butter, honey, fresh berries for serving

Combine yeast and 1¼ C. cornmeal in a large bowl. Stir in 1 C. lukewarm water. Add another ½ C. water if needed to achieve a pancake-batter consistency. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

When ready to cook, preheat oven to 200°. Add ½ to 1 C. water to the batter. Stir in salt and egg until blended. Gradually add remaining 1¼ C. cornmeal, alternating with enough additional water to create a batter similar to waffle batter. Cover and let stand 15 to 20 minutes.

Heat a lightly greased griddle over medium-high heat. Drop ¼ C. batter onto the griddle for each hoecake. Cook about 5 minutes, or until lightly browned. Turn and cook 4 to 5 minutes more until browned on both sides. Keep warm in the oven while preparing the remaining hoecakes.

Serve warm, and as George Washington liked, "swimming in melted butter and honey." Garnish with fresh berries.

Anselma Cornbread

Corn helped sustain the Continental Army through one of its darkest winters. Oneida allies brought corn and shared Indigenous food traditions with the starving soldiers at Valley Forge, while nearby mills such as Anselma were important enough to be marked for destruction on British

military maps. Though officers might occasionally enjoy pastries and cakes made from prized wheat flour, cornmeal remained the grain that fed much of the army.



Serves 6. Note: Recipe may be cut in half and baked in an 8x8-inch square pan.

- 2 C. all-purpose flour
- 2 C. Anselma stone-ground cornmeal
- 1 tsp. salt
- ⅔ C. sugar
- 8 tsp. baking powder
- 4 large eggs
- 2 C. milk
- ⅔ C. melted butter

Preheat oven to 425°. Grease a 9x13-inch baking pan.

In a large bowl, combine flour, cornmeal, salt, sugar and baking powder. In a separate bowl, whisk together eggs, milk and melted butter until blended. Pour wet ingredients into dry ingredients and stir just until combined. Do not overmix.

Pour batter into the prepared pan and let stand 5 minutes. Bake 20 to 25 minutes, or until golden brown. Cool slightly before cutting and serving.

Anselma Cornmeal Pound Cake

By adjusting the gap beneath a spinning, 3,500-pound French buhr stone, the mill can either shear grain into fine pastry flour or crack corn into fine cornmeal. This precise weight and mechanical control allow the Mill at Anselma to produce both distinct grains for this historic pound cake. This technology was the Apple iPhone of its time — an expensive, hyper-engineered import coveted by local millers to produce the superfine so-called Brandywine flour exported straight to the royal courts of Europe.

Serves 6

- 3½ sticks unsalted butter, softened
- 1¼ C. sugar
- 6 large eggs
- 2 T. milk



- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 2½ C. Anselma pastry flour
- ½ C. Anselma dark-roasted cornmeal
- 1½ tsp. baking powder
- ¼ tsp. salt

Preheat oven to 350°. Butter and flour a 9x5-inch loaf pan.

Using a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream butter and sugar until smooth, about 2 minutes.

In a separate bowl, lightly beat eggs. Add milk and vanilla and mix well. Gradually add to the butter mixture, beating until well combined.

In another bowl, whisk together flour, cornmeal, baking powder and salt. Gradually add dry ingredients to the batter. Fold gently with a spatula until evenly combined.

Transfer batter to the prepared pan and smooth the top. Bake 15 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 325° and continue baking about 1 hour, or until a tester inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool slightly on a wire rack before serving.

Hannah Till's Ginger Buttons for Lafayette

Baking at Valley Forge was a high-stakes balancing act of chemistry and raw skill, where master pastry chef Hannah Till managed finicky, premium ingredients under brutal winter conditions. Her culinary expertise so impressed the Marquis de Lafayette that he hired her from Washington to run his headquarters' kitchen and called her "Tante Hannah" for the rest of her life. Dense, sturdy and richly flavored with molasses, these ginger buttons would have traveled well between encampments and headquarters.

Serves 6

- 2¼ C. pastry flour or all-purpose flour
- 1 T. ground ginger
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp. ground cloves
- ½ C. unsalted butter, softened



- ½ C. packed dark brown sugar
- ⅓ C. dark molasses
- 1 large egg
- Granulated sugar, for rolling

In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, ginger, cinnamon and cloves. In a large bowl, cream butter and brown sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in molasses and egg until thoroughly combined.

Gradually add the flour mixture to the wet ingredients, stirring until a stiff dough forms. Wrap dough tightly and refrigerate at least 1 hour.

Preheat oven to 350°. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Shape dough into 1-inch balls. Roll each ball in granulated sugar and place on the prepared baking sheet, leaving space between each cookie.

Bake 10 to 12 minutes, or until bottoms are lightly browned and tops begin to crack. Cool on the baking sheet for several minutes before transferring to a wire rack to cool completely.

Note: Written recipes did not survive the encampment, but the history of Hannah Till and General Lafayette is documented, as well as his particular sweet tooth for American gingerbread and regional flavors.

Officer's Table Chicken Pies

The Continental Army was democratic in its ideals, but not in its dining. Washington, Lafayette and the other senior officers expected meals befitting their rank, and headquarters kitchens worked to provide them even during hardship. Hannah Till might have prepared similar pies with rabbit, pigeon, duck or other game, while salt pork was a staple of camp cooking. Chicken and bacon are used here as accessible modern substitutes.

Serves 6

- 4 oz. thick-cut bacon, diced
- 2 lbs. boneless, skinless chicken thighs, cut into ½-inch pieces
- 1 large yellow onion, finely diced
- 1 large parsnip, peeled and diced
- 1 carrot, peeled and diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 T. flour



- 2 C. chicken stock
- 1 tsp. fresh thyme leaves
- 1 T. chopped fresh parsley
- ¼ tsp. ground nutmeg
- 1 tsp. salt
- ½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- 2 sheets frozen puff pastry, thawed
- 1 egg, beaten with 1 T. water

Preheat oven to 400°. Cook bacon in a large skillet over medium heat until lightly crisp. Remove with a slotted spoon and reserve, leaving drippings in the pan.

Add chicken and cook until lightly browned. Transfer to a bowl and set aside.

Add onion, parsnip and carrot to the skillet and cook until softened, about 5 to 7 minutes. Stir in garlic and cook 1 minute more. Sprinkle flour over vegetables and cook, stirring constantly, for 1 minute. Gradually whisk in chicken stock until smooth and slightly thickened.

Return chicken and bacon to the skillet. Stir in thyme, parsley, nutmeg, salt and pepper. Simmer 5 minutes. Remove from heat and cool slightly. Divide filling among six individual oven-safe ramekins or pie dishes.

Cut pastry into circles slightly larger than the dishes. Place pastry over filling and crimp edges lightly with a fork. Cut a small vent in the center of each crust and brush with egg wash.

Bake 20 to 25 minutes, until pastry is golden brown and filling is bubbling. Allow to rest 10 minutes before serving. ♦

Liz Tarditi is a chef and wine specialist with more than 30 years of experience in food, wine and event planning. She holds degrees from Villanova University and from a Seattle culinary arts program founded by a Certified French Master Chef, where she trained in a classic brigade-style kitchen. Liz later ran her own catering company and has worked as a wine specialist in Pennsylvania. She brings her training and lifelong passion for seasonal, approachable cooking to Brandywine Table.



Living History at the Mill at Anselma

When most people think of historic sites, they picture cold gravestones, deserted battlefields and monuments honoring the fallen. There's a shadow of death and separation between the living and the past. The Mill at Anselma in Chester Springs is different. It was a hub of local life in its heyday, and still today it's a living place.

Back in 1747, the mill was built with massive French buhr millstones that paid for their own voyage — used as ballast in the ship that brought them from France. These millstones transformed local red wheat, corn and other grains into flour and meal, not just for the local farms. This was the most modern technology of its time and turned out the finest pastry flour on the planet, prized by the royal kitchens of Europe. Mills like Anselma were so vital to daily life that British military maps marked them as strategic targets during the Revolutionary War.

Today, water still turns the original wheels, grinding grain much as it was ground centuries ago. Schoolchildren gather to watch grain tumble from the stones and run their hands through freshly milled meal. Couples exchange vows beneath centuries-old sycamores on the property. Musicians perform, an artisan baker arrives hours early to fire up the beehive oven, and visitors carry home flour ground completely without electricity. This flour is finer, and more nutritious food, than commercial factory milling, and has to be stored in the freezer.

Nearly 280 years after its construction, the mill, the pond, the trails and beautiful woodland acres of the property remain what they have always been — a place where community gathers around food, craft and shared experience, sustained by the volunteers and staff whose stewardship ensures that its story continues. Learn more at AnselmaMill.org.

