

What the Devil? A Brief History of the Deviled Egg

Geeks like me (see all of my previous Health Code Warrior articles) spend time asking insane questions like – Who the heck invented the deviled egg? And as any self respecting culinarian will tell you, there are boat loads of books out there on food history and culture to aid you in your search for truth and knowledge. But any good geek will also just tell you to hit the internet!

The history of the egg itself is vast and deep with the symbolism of the egg evoking all types of religious and cultural meaning. Early, India, China and Egypt all have lengthy relationships with the egg but the first domesticated fowl (thus bearing eggs) to come to North America came with Columbus's second voyage in 1493.

The deviled egg in particular also has incarnations dating back as far as the Romans, but food historians note that the official term of "devilling" as applied to food did not become common practice until the 18th century. The term came about in England and was generally associated with highly seasoned meat and fried dishes.

The Encyclopedia of American Food and Drink lists "deviled" as

"...any variety of dishes prepared with hot seasonings, such as cayenne or mustard. The word derives from the association with the demon who dwells in hell. In culinary context the word first appears in print in 1786; by 1820 Washington Irving has used the word in his *Sketchbook* to describe a highly seasoned dish similar to a curry. Deviled dishes were popular throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries, especially for seafood preparations and some appetizers."

The deviled egg's popularity can't be denied: witness the unitasker, the deviled egg plate. Admit it, you have one in your china cabinet, and it gets used at least once a year.

Unfortunately, however, even with the vast resources of the web at our fingertips and a plethora of food history books at our side, a specific person, place or date can't be pinned down for our dear friend the deviled egg. This month we have decided to celebrate their creation nevertheless as it is our firm opinion here at Bittersweet that you can't have a party without `em!

Do you have a secret family deviled egg recipe that gets wolfed down at every family function? Care to share? We'd love to hear about your concoctions and will even award a special surprise to the most creative recipe.

Send your submissions to rachael@bittersweetcatering.com with the word Deviled Eggs in the subject line by April 20, 2007.