

Foods and Living in the 1870's around Pittsburgh, Pa

The average wage earner only made \$16.00 a week.

Cost of Food

1 Bag of Flour \$1.50. Milk .56 cents. 1# coffee .35 Cents. Vegetables .50 Cents #
Sugar 3 1/2# \$1.05. 4# butter \$1.50. Rent \$4.00 a week. Meats \$3.50 a week

Most people ate what they grew or hunted locally. Corn and beans were common, along with pork. Cows provided milk, butter, and beef. Preserving food before the era of refrigeration required smoking, drying, and salting meats. Vegetables were kept in the root cellar or pickled.

People baked breads in many forms: some pure wheat forms and some made from mixed grains. They made all kinds of sweet desserts, including boiled and baked puddings, fruit tarts, pies and cakes, and fools (berries and sweet custard).

It is important to remember that food was both regional and more local than it is today. People would eat what was available in their area. There were no convenience foods. Everything was made from scratch.

Poor people ate less hearty fare of course, but they would have access to game if they lived in the country, and foraged for things like berries and mushrooms, nettles and fiddleheads in the spring and cattail roots in the summer, depending on where they lived

Cooking was hard back in the day. You had to wrestle meat into the kettles while keeping your long skirts out of the fire. An alarming number of women were burnt or scalded in their own kitchens. And house fires were common.

If you looked at menus from restaurants and hotels in the 1870's, you would see roasted and boiled meats like organ meats such as liver and kidneys, assortments of cold meats like ham, veal and chicken, and fish, eggs and potatoes prepared in several different ways.

Some Bill of Fare in 1870's

Breakfast: Corn bread, stew, cooked eggs, hot cakes, fried potatoes, omelets.

Dinner: Soup, calves head, vegetables, mutton, poultry, roast pig, roast turkey.

Dessert: Puddings, pies and custards, jelly, and stewed fruits.

Tea: Bread, milk toast, stewed fruit, frizzled beef, cake, currant jelly.

Most main meals had meat, vegetables, pies, stew, hash, rare bit, beef, goose, and turkey.