

Moravian Cookies ^[1]

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Moravian Cookies

by Amy Kemp, 2017

North Carolina Government and Heritage Library



Moravian Cookies canister, ca. 1970s. Item H.1971.24.5, from the collection of the North Carolina Museum of History. Used courtesy of the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.

^[2]One of the most famed historic Moravian ^[3] culinary treats is the spice cookie. The cookie is extremely thin, usually around one millimeter in height, and is traditionally circular and about two inches in diameter with scalloped ridges.

During the age of exploration, European travelers brought new goods and spices back to their homelands, influencing the region's traditional foods. The Moravian spice cookie is a descendant of the German Lebkuchen cookie. Moravians brought the treat with them when they immigrated to central North Carolina ^[4] in 1753, attracted by the region's fertile soil, plentiful water, and moderate climate.

The traditional Moravian spice cookie was favored by molasses, ginger, and cloves. These spices stored well could still be used after their long journey from their tropical regions of production to North Carolina. The spices were expensive, however, so the cookies were usually prepared only for holidays and special occasions. Early Moravians referred to these cookies as 'cakes.'

The spice dough was made in large batches and was not all baked at once. The dough could be stored for days or weeks during the winter, intensifying the spices' flavor.

The trademark thinness of the cookie had many traditional advantages. Pragmatically, rolling the cookies very thin allowed for a greater number of cookies to be produced from the dough. Thin cookies also baked quickly, allowing the baker to get on with other chores. Molasses, a main ingredient in the cookies, also bakes very hard, and a thick cookie could easily not be bitten or chewed.

Today, Winston-Salem is considered the center of Moravian cookie production, with millions of pounds of cookies being baked, packaged, and distributed worldwide each year. Many companies in the Winston-Salem area are noted for their Moravian Cookies, including the Salem Baking Company, Dewey's Bakery, and Mrs. Hanes' Moravian Cookies. Current flavors extend far beyond the original spice, and one can often find popular varieties such as lemon, chocolate, pumpkin, or key lime.

References:

Hughes, Leah. "Sweetest History Lesson". *Our State*, December 2012. <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/ref/collection/p16062coll18/id/107254> ^[5]

"Moravian Cookie Trail". *Visit Winston Salem*.&<https://visitwinstonsalem.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Moravian-Culina...> ^[6]

Additional Resources:

"Sweetest History Lesson," *Our State*, December 2012. <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/digital/collection/p16062coll18/id/107254> ^[7]

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[Cookie container.] Photograph. ca. 1970s. Item H.1971.24.5, North Carolina Museum of History Collections. <http://collections.ncdcr.gov/RediscoveryProficioPublicSearch/ShowImageView.aspx?41275> ^[2]

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