

The International Happiness of Pancakes

By Dennis Knight

Windsor Gardens renews its place in the rich history of pancakes with a Pancake Breakfast on Saturday, May 19th, kicking off the celebration of our community's first fifty years.

Pancakes are one of the earliest and most widespread of foods, at first using rocks for the grinding of available grains and hot, flat stones to cook them on. The ancient Greeks made pancakes called *tagenias* and, through the centuries, the art of making and eating pancakes has been mastered with similarities and differences in nearly every culture.

In America, pancakes are also called *hotcakes*, *griddlecakes* or *flapjacks*. The batter of eggs, flour and milk or buttermilk and a leavening agent such as baking powder is ladled onto a hot surface, and spreads to form a circle in a thickness of about a quarter of an inch.

Aaaaah. These light, fluffy delicacies are usually served at breakfast with combinations of maple syrup, butter, jam, fruits, honey, powdered sugar, whipped cream or molasses.

American prospectors and pioneers would carry a pot of living sourdough and it could last indefinitely, needing only flour and water to replenish it. Sourdough pancakes are now a particular specialty in Alaska.

Another uniquely American variety, the *johnnycake*, is a cornmeal flatbread that had its origin among the early indigenous peoples because corn is native to our continent. The johnnycake is still popular in New England and as far south as the West Indies and Bermuda.

In Scotland and Ireland, pancakes are known as *Scotch Pancakes*, *Drop Scones* or *Griddle Cakes* and in Wales, *Crempog*. In England and other parts of the United Kingdom, including Canada and Australia, they enjoy a special Pancake Day on Shrove Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday, as a way to use up supplies of sugar, fat, eggs and other rich foods which are traditionally given up for Lent.

Thin, light French *Crêpes* and the Italian *Crespelle* are used in the cuisines of both countries as savory and sweet dishes. In Germany, pancakes are called *Pfannkuchen*, meaning 'pan' and 'cake', or in Berlin, *Eierkuchen*. *Kaiserschmarrn* is a light caramelized pancake filled with fruits and nuts first prepared for the Kaiser in Austria. The Dutch enjoy *pannenkoeken* and eat them for dinner with fillings of apples, cheese, ham or bacon, as well as a molasses called *stroop*.

The list goes on. In Sweden, they are *pannkakor*, in Finland *lettu*, and in Iceland, "*pönnukaka*". Russians enjoy light *blintzes*, and thicker *blini*. Like the Pancake Day in Great Britain, the Russians have Pancake Week to enjoy blinis just before the onset of Lent.

Pancakes in the African regions of Djibouti, Ethiopia and Somalia are known as *injera*. In Ethiopia small pieces of *injera* are torn and used as utensils to grasp stews and salads for eating.

I know there are readers who have enjoyed many of the pancakes I have mentioned and the many I haven't, but this month we all come together to celebrate light and fluffy American pancakes, with all the trimmings, Windsor Gardens style. Eat hearty!