

July 10, 2013

**TOURING SULLIVAN  
COUNTY'S MUSEUM  
. . . while dusting**



Many is the time that we have artifacts within the museum's multiple displays throughout the complex, that some articles overlap centuries. This is the case with the subject of bread, in particular yeast breads. Investigation finds that the earliest known origin of yeast leavened bread was originated in Egypt around 2,600 B.C. On this continent, Native American

Indians had produced a type of roasted bread from corn, roots or pumpkins but in the words of a New Englander in 1654 named Edward Johnson "The want of English graine . . . proved a sore affliction to some stomachs, who could not live upon Indian bread." From the mid 1600's onward, Pilgrims were able to develop what became known as 'Boston brown bread'. Slowly, from England, there eventually came bakers and shops but most preferred to bake their own bread at home.

Wild yeast and egg whites were initially the tricky ingredients for leavening bread. Then came the new chemistry of potash as an agent in the mid eighteenth century. This agent, derived from burned wood, relied on the gases that were produced by the chemical reaction that occurred when it was mixed with other substances. Because it's an alkali it needs to be mixed with milk, sour milk, lemon, wine or molasses. This method though did leave a distinctive bitter taste. By 1834 a discovery by a physician named Austin Church was to use sodium bicarbonate or baking soda.

In 1870 Austrian immigrants to the U.S., Charles and Henry Fleischmann patented a method of producing cubes of compressed, dried yeast cakes. Because this product was more predictable than others, it began to catch on in America. The evolution of yeast can be found in grocery stores today that make it so simple as to be a packet that comes pre-measured for a single loaf. And the very fact that you can find yeast on store shelves suggest that there are enough people to still warrant its use. The smell of fresh bread baking, like those early New Englanders, is one odor that can stay in smiling memory.

To see this and more displays, the museum is open for summer hours on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 1 to 5 p.m. Or you can phone for an appointment (570)946-5020 or email [museum@scpahistory.com](mailto:museum@scpahistory.com) or check out our website at [www.scpahistory.com](http://www.scpahistory.com) Meanwhile friend us at [sullivancountypahistoricalociety](https://www.facebook.com/sullivancountypahistoricalociety) on Facebook.