

PA Milk Marketing Board
Carol A. Hardbarger

Celebrating Ice Cream Month

July is National Ice Cream Month. Oh, goody. I am forced to honor the occasion by writing about my favorite thing (as if you didn't know). I recently wrote about teaberry ice cream and the fondness we in PA hold for it. I have written about the ice cream trail and provided various recipes.

What can I add to those musings? I think some trivia might be in order!

The origins of ice cream can be traced as far back as the 2nd century B.C. when Alexander the Great enjoyed snow and ice flavored with honey. There are also references to snow-based beverages in the Old Testament and historical records show that Marco Polo left China with a recipe that many think of as a forerunner of modern sherbet.

By the 16th century, milk and cream were added and the results were enjoyed by European royals; however, it wasn't until the next century that the treat was made available to the commoner.

Of course, once emigration to the New World began, ice cream came with the settlers. The first written account of it was in a letter written by a guest of Maryland's Governor Bladen in 1744. Ice cream was first advertised in the New York Gazette on May 12, 1777, by confectioner Philip Lenzi. And another New York merchant recorded that George Washington spent about \$200 on ice cream during the summer of 1790.

Since that seems like a lot of money for that time period, I checked to see how much \$200 is worth in today's dollars. It is nearly \$5,900! Imagine! Washington's property inventory conducted at Mt. Vernon after his death showed that he possessed several "ice cream pots," used to make homemade ice cream. I've decided that I need to check my ancestry—surely, I am related to him.

The love of ice cream didn't stop with George Washington, either. Thomas Jefferson made ice cream and even developed a recipe for something similar to what we call a Baked Alaska. If you want to see a copy of his recipe for vanilla ice cream, you can view it at <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/tr33b.html#obj36>.

That's a little history of ice cream from colonial times and earlier, so how about some interesting facts about the ice cream business?

Seems that ice cream in America was initially only consumed by the elite, just as it was in Europe a few centuries in the past. It wasn't until 1851, when a Baltimore milk dealer named Jacob Fussell invented a way to make larger quantities for sale, that ice cream was made available to the general population. The invention of mechanization and refrigeration aided in this development.

You might find it interesting to know that religious leaders of the late 19th century criticized the use of the term “Ice Cream Sunday,” believing it wrong to associate “sinfully rich” confections with a Sunday. The name was changed to “Ice Cream Sundae” to remove any connection with the Sabbath, much to the delight of many people I am sure.

And did you know? Pennsylvania boasts the oldest ice cream parlor in the country—Bassett’s, of Philadelphia. Today, Bassett’s can be found at the Reading Terminal Market on N. 12th St. and it is there you can sample one or more of their 40 flavors by cone or cup, or by container to take some home.

Ice cream even had a place in World War II. Each branch of the military tried to outdo the other with the amount served to its respective troops! Gotta love it! After the war, Americans celebrated victory by consuming over 20 quarts (40 pints) per person in 1946. Just so you know, we actually consume a little more than that today at 44 pints per person.

Pennsylvanians rank 11th in the US in ice cream consumption. Rita’s of Philadelphia ranks 9th in the country in popularity (I love gelato.). We have a lot to be proud of, but I WOULD like to see that ranking of 11th in total consumption move into the top 10 and—can I dream—the top 5. I promise that I will do my part.

Today, the availability of flavors is almost overwhelming, but old-fashioned vanilla and chocolate are the favorites across the country. We can buy fat-free, or sugar-free, or lactose-free ice cream. There should be no excuse for any of you to not have your celebratory moments this July.

While you are at it, have a Hot Fudge Sundae or Banana Split for me and remind yourself that we are lucky to live in an area that produces some of the creamiest and best tasting ice cream in the world. Enjoy your July!

I would like to give credit to the International Dairy Foods Association as the source for most facts in this article.

PMMB is always available to respond to questions and concerns. I can be reached at 717-210-8244 or by email at chardbarge@pa.gov.