Women of New France 4: Cooking

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Open Hearth Cooking

People prepared meals in the 18th century over a fire or hot coals. Fireplaces varied substantially in terms of how they were equipped, and what hardware was used to assist with cooking. Most fireplaces in frontier areas were small and did not include dampers. Some may have had a "crane" to move pots in and out of the fire, while others may have had a crémailler (a notched metal rod attached to a horizontal brace in the fire place) to move pots closer to, or away from, the fire or coals. Baking occurred in a cast iron oven (Dutch oven) on the hearth. In more densely populated communities, people used a brick or mud oven built outside for baking.

On the Table

Unlike in Europe, laws did not restrict hunting and fishing, and the men of New France became excellent marksmen. The habitants quickly introduced the new animal and plant foods of North America into their diets including deer, other wild animals, corn, squash, and maple sugar.

"I have seldom seen any people shoot with such dexterity as these. . . . There was scarcely one of them who was not a clever marksman and who did not own a rifle." ~ Peter Kalm, 1749

"Squashes are a kind of pumpkin which the Europeans got from the Indians, . . . They are eaten boiled, either with meat or by themselves." ~ Peter Kalm, 1748