

Old-Fashioned Sourdough Rises In Popularity

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PITMAN (Schuylkill Co.) —
Confused about sourdough bak-
ing? See all those recipes that seem
to give conflicting advice?

The reason for conflicting
recipes stems from several diffe-
rent methods of preparing a sour-
dough yeast. The confusion comes
from thinking the methods are the
same since each is called
sourdough.

Three different methods of mak-
ing sourdough will be examined in
this article.

Sourdough is a type of yeast
production. It was the most com-
mon way used to make raised
bread in the years before packaged
yeast was available.

People still enjoy the taste of
this old-fashioned bread and the
many other baked items that can be
made from it.

One of the oldest methods and
the one used by our ancestors on
the wagon train, is still made today
by Johannes Zinzendorf of the
Christiansbrunn Kloster in Pitman.

This method requires no store-
bought yeast and is easy to prepare
the starter from potatoes.

Sourdough gets its name from
the way it captures yeast fungus in
the air. Yeast fungus is not harmful
since it is naturally occurring and
we constantly breathe the spores
that are in the air.

"There are no secrets — just
common sense and experience to
make sourdough bread," said Zin-
zendorf. "It was the most common
way of raising bread in Pennsylva-
nia in the 1600s because it works
and is almost impossible to kill if it
is done correctly. That's why it
was taken in the wagon trains."

Zinzendorf said, "Doing suc-
cessful sourdough is like success-
ful farming. Just like you need to

prepare the soil properly, you need
to prepare the mixing bowl ingre-
dients to provide a proper nutrient
base."

According to Zinzendorf, the
potato-based recipe is excellent as
the potato provides a better source
of starch and carbohydrates than
flour alone. The sugar and salt are
also necessary so when the airborne
yeast lands on the mixture, it
begins to multiply. The life cycle is
short and as the fungus dies, it
emits gas that are the bubbles in the
yeast.

"The major misconception is
that sourdough is only viable if it is
frothy and bubbling, that is not the
case," Zinzendorf said.

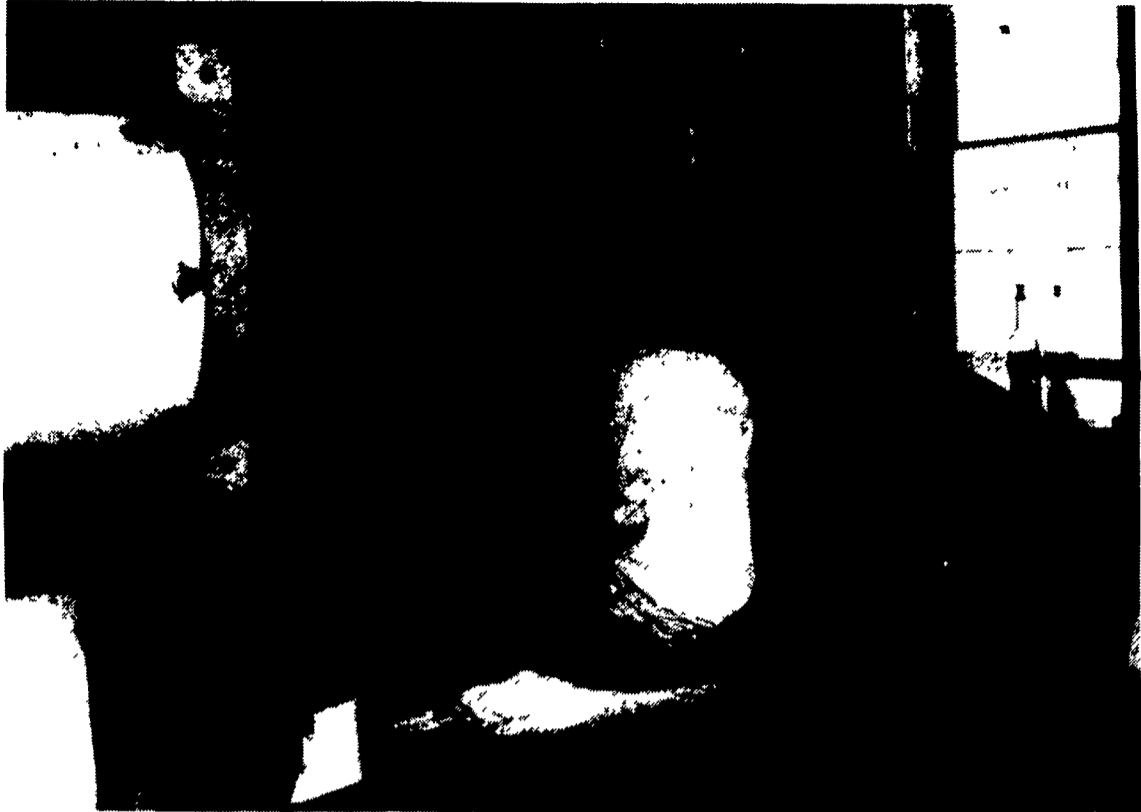
"Often it froths and bubbles as it
begins to ferment. A brownish liq-
uid covers the top — this is alco-
hol. This fermentation is not only
natural, it must be allowed to hap-
pen — that is what makes sour-
dough sour. It provides most of the
flavor. Without it, you get a very
bland result that many people seem
to like, but it is not an authentic
sourdough."

He said that the fermentation
does not kill the yeast, it preserves
it. There is no reason to freeze it.

"I've left mine in a crock in the
spring for months at a time and it
always comes back. Refrigeration
works just as well," Zinzendorf
said.

To rejuvenate yeast activity,
make a new batch of potato/water/
sugar/salt like you do to start the
sourdough. This time, add one to
two cups flour to make a sponge.
Add to the fermented soughdough
and let it rise in a warm place for
six to 24 hours or until it starts to
bubble and froth. Use this in
recipes, but always save a few cups
to return to the crock for using the
next time.

Sourdough is tough. It does not



Johannes Zinzendorf prepares sourdough bread at the Christiansbrunn Kloster in Pitman.

need to be treated gently.

SOURDOUGH STARTER SPONGE

Peel and slice 3 medium-sized
potatoes

Boil in 2 quarts water until soft.
Drain and save water. Mash pota-
toes and return to water. Add:

- 4 tablespoons sugar
- 1 tablespoon salt

Let stand uncovered for 3 days
until mixture begins to bubble. Put
in crock, cover, and store in
refrigerator until ready to use.

The day before each weekly
baking day, Zinzendorf prepares
the sponge. Into a crock, he puts
the following:

- 3 handfuls of high-gluten bread
flour
- 4 tablespoons sugar
- 1 tablespoon salt

Meanwhile boil three potatoes,
strain and mash. Put potato water
into a crock. Mix and add mashed
potatoes, sourdough with
enough lukewarm water to make
1½ gallons starter. Let set by fire
or warm place until evening. It
should froth and foam.

Before going to bed, grease
dough box. Put in two quarts bread
flour, add starter but reserve 2
quarts for the next baking day.

Mix and knead ingredients,
adding flour until dough is dry.
Cover and set by fire or stove to
rise overnight.

The following day, Zinzendorf
bakes his bread in an outdoor bake
oven. For baking in a regular oven,
separate the dough into individual
loaves and let rise.

Bake in 350 degree oven for
about one hour.

HERMAN YEAST STARTER

A more popular sourdough
method is often referred to as Her-
man Yeast Starter or Amish
Friendship dough. The starter
requires the use the store-bought
active dry yeast. These recipes are
from Doris Brown of Pine
Grove.

HERMAN OR FRIENDSHIP STARTER

- 1 cup sugar
- ½ cup warm water
- 2 envelopes active dry yeast
- 2 cups milk
- 2 cups flour

Sprinkle one tablespoon sugar
over warm water. Sprinkle yeast
on top. Let stand in warm place
until doubled in size, about 10
minutes. Mix milk, remaining
sugar, flour, and yeast mixture.
Place in plastic or glass container
about the size of a 5-quart incream
container. Stir using wooden
spoon (metal retards yeast
growth).

Cover loosely. Let stand in
warm place overnight. Next day,
refrigerate. Stir daily with wooden
spoon. On fifth day, use 1 cup and
give one cup as a gift. Feed remain-
ing starter with 1 cup flour, 1 cup
milk, and ½ cup sugar. Use 1 cup
every 5 days, giving 1 cup to a
friend and feeding remaining
mixture.

HERMAN WHEAT AND HONEY STARTER

- ½ cup honey or brown sugar
- ½ cup warm water
- 2 envelopes active dry yeast
- 2 cups milk
- 1 cup whole wheat flour
- 1 cup white flour
- 1 tablespoon ginger

Stir one tablespoon honey or
brown sugar into warm water.
Sprinkle yeast on top. Let stand in
warm place until double in size,
about 10 minutes. Mix milk,
remaining honey or brown sugar,
flour, ginger, and yeast mixture.
Place in plastic or glass container
about the size of a 5 quart ice
cream bucket. Stir using a wooden
spoon or paddle (metal retards
yeast growth). Cover loosely. Let
stand in warm place overnight.
Next day: refrigerate, stir every
day with wooden spoon. On 5th
day, measure out 1 cup to bake
with, 1 cup for gifts. Feed remain-
ing starter with 1 cup white flour, 1
cup milk, and ½ cup sugar. Stir
well. Refrigerate and stir daily. On
10th day, give 1 cup to a friend.
Use 1 cup in recipe, plus feed as
before. Thereafter, use starter
almost daily and feed every 5th
day.

HERMAN WHOLE-WHEAT APPLESAUCE CAKE

- ½ cup granulated sugar
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup honey
- ½ cup butter
- ½ cup shortening
- 1½ teaspoon salt
- 2 eggs

1 cup Herman wheat and honey
starter

- 1½ cups applesauce
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 teaspoon rum flavoring
- 1½ cups white flour
- ½ cup whole wheat flour
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon allspice and ground
cloves

1 teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon baking soda
1 cup raisins, optional
1 cup broken walnuts, optional
Cream together sugars, honey,
butter, shortening, and salt until
light and fluffy. Add eggs one at a
time mixing thoroughly. Add Her-
man starter, applesauce, vanilla
and rum flavorings.

In another bowl, combine
flours, spices, baking powder, and
baking soda. Mix thoroughly with
wire whisk. Fold into creamed
mixture. Fold in raisins and nuts.
Pour into greased and floured
10-inch tube pan or bundt pan.
Bake at 350 degrees, 75-80
minutes or until toothpick inserted
in cake comes out clean.

HERMAN COFFEE CAKE

- 1 cup sugar
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- 2 eggs
- 2 cups Herman or Friendship
starter
- 2 cups flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- 1½ teaspoons cinnamon

Topping:
1 cup packed brown sugar
½ cup butter
1 tablespoon flour
½ teaspoon cinnamon
Beat sugar into oil. Add eggs
and starter. Combine flour, baking
powder, baking soda, and cinna-
mon. Add to starter mixture. Pour
batter into lightly greased
9x13-inch pan.

Topping: cut sugar, flour, and
cinnamon into butter until crumb-
ly. Sprinkle over batter in pan.
Bake at 350 degrees or 30 minutes
or until golden.



Sourdough rises overnight when placed in a warm area.



Old-fashioned sourdough bread is baked outside in a bake oven that Zinzendorf built in the same style as his ancestors used.

