

HUMBLE PIE

A NOBLE MEAL FIT FOR A KING



Wife, bid these gentlemen welcome: — come, we have a hot venison pasty to dinner; come, gentlemen, I hope we shall drink down all unkindness.

— William Shakespeare
Merry Wives of Windsor.

Jennifer Greenhill-Taylor
Staff writer

The pasty (rhymes with fast-ee) referred to by Shakespeare in his *Merry Wives of Windsor*, is none other than that noble dish, the humble meat pie.

When Simple Simon implored the pieman in the familiar nursery rhyme for a sample of his wares, he was not asking for cherry pie. That pieman going to the fair was selling savory meat pies, the original fast food.

Even in medieval times, takeout was no new phenomenon. Meat-filled pastries, invented to provide a way to carry hearty stews out to the workplace, have long been main dish foods in many cultures.

In the days before aluminum foil, plastic wrap or insulated lunch pails, transporting good sturdy food for a midday meal called for a little inventiveness. Combinations of meat and vegetables in heavy gravy or sauce wrapped in a variety of pastries for generations have accompanied farmers, miners and mill-workers to work and children to school.

Often the workers would heat the pies by placing them on a shovel blade and putting the shovel over a fire.

Some cooks would even tuck a sweet filling into one end of the turnover. Both dinner and dessert came wrapped in one convenient packet.

The meat pie has a long and hearty history. According to the *Woman's Day Encyclopedia of Cookery*, it is a dish of great antiquity, mentioned as "pastes of venysoun" in the Robin Hood ballads of England.

Time-Life's cookbook series, *American Cooking*, says meat pies were mentioned by historians as far back as the 14th century.

In children's nursery rhymes, the meat pie, or in one case a blackbird pie, is described as a tasty dish to set before a king.

Although the meat pie has fallen far from its original widespread glory, lost in the world of icebox pot pies, it may be making a comeback. As a quick and easy "tasty dish" the pie is beyond reproach. With the surge of interest in regional and ethnic foods, the pie may be awakening from its slumber to take its place among the standard takeout foods such as fried chicken, biscuits, hamburgers and barbecue.

Meat and vegetable pies are an important part of many ethnic and regional cooking traditions.

Britain has pork pies, Cornish pasties and sausage rolls, and Scotland has meat pies and Forfar bridies. Greeks eat phyllo dough pies filled with spinach. Arabic countries have pita breads folded around lamb or spinach filling, and Canadians enjoy Tourtiere, a pork and beef pie in egg pastry.

Jamaicans devour patties, spicy meat in a bright yellow-orange pastry shell. Italians munch calzone, an enclosed pizza. Australians enjoy their own version of the meat pie. Russians eat pirogi, which are pastry-enclosed meat pies.

These foods are sturdy peasant fare, which can be made at home without too much fuss, from good healthy basic ingredients.

All the pies freeze well, so set your kitchen up to make pastry one day soon, before the heat hits and bak-