

## HISTORIC PEPPER POT SOUP

Happy Pepper Pot Day! If you are like me, this may be a food holiday unfamiliar to you. But never fear; I am here to unpack its rich history!

### The Story

According to American lore, thick and spicy pepper pot soup became popular during the Revolutionary War with the Continental Army at Valley Forge in 1777. The army was running low on food and morale, but there were not many crops to feed them. Christopher Ludwick, baker general, thought of just the meal, soup, for the soldiers. He gathered tripe (cow stomach lining), meat, vegetables, peppercorn, and a few other seasonings. With these ingredients, he made soup to feed an army. This soup fed them throughout the harsh winter and became known as pepper pot, or “the soup that won the war.”

That sounds like a great story, right? Well, that’s not quite how pepper pot soup first came about.

### The Real History

After digging deeper, I found that pepper pot soup is actually a popular dish in Jamaica. The myth of this soup beginning in Valley Forge, I believe, has stuck because it is a dish the tourists would try in Philadelphia because of its past.

So what is the *real* history of pepper pot soup? This soup originated in West Africa and the Caribbean. The slave trade brought this dish into North America, where it was popularized as street food in the 1800s. The soup got its name from a generous amount of whole black pepper.

Pepper pot soup became an iconic culinary staple of Philadelphia, its popularity often compared to that of the signature Philly Cheesesteak. The ingredients are like those described in the Valley Forge myth, with frequent additions of vegetables, cassava, and leafy vegetables. The dish had developed characteristics making it uniquely Philadelphian. Philadelphia pepper pot became popular throughout the country before declining in the early twenty-first century. Although it disappeared from most menus, pepper pot is still found in select restaurants in the Philadelphia area.

Pepper pot’s ingredients differ depending on where and when it was made. Pepper pot soup has many, many variations to it. Dishes of this type had no specific recipe, only general guidelines to follow—meat, vegetables, and other available ingredients slowly cooked in one pot and typically eaten with bread.

Now let’s focus on tripe. Tripe is the lining of beef, hog, or sheep stomach. Beef tripe is most often obtained from the first three of the four stomachs of beef cattle. The most tender and mild-flavored tripe is called honeycomb because one side has a honeycomb pattern. Tripe softens into a silky texture with extended cooking, so it is used in soups, stews, and other long-simmered dishes. Despite the psychological barrier that some people experience concerning eating an animal’s stomach lining, tripe has a mild flavor and combines nicely with many other ingredients. Tripe absorbs the flavors of the dish.

Did you know people dined on Campbell's ready-to-eat version from 1899 until it was discontinued in 2010? Campbell's pepper pot soup ingredients included cooked beef tripe and beef tripe stock.

Gather the necessary ingredients to make your own pepper pot soup and share it with your friends and family. Pepper pot soup is quite easy to make, but it requires a lengthy simmering time, so it is a good idea to plan ahead.

One of the great ways to celebrate this historic dish is to make your own pepper pot soup. Soup is a great way to warm up on a cold and dark winter's night. Happy eating!

(Sources: [www.colonialwilliamsburg.org](http://www.colonialwilliamsburg.org); [www.daysoftheyear.com](http://www.daysoftheyear.com); [www.nationaldaystoday.com](http://www.nationaldaystoday.com); [usda.gov](http://usda.gov))