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Acton/Georgetown, Friday, March 24, 2006 13

Potatoes began their history in South America

Do you remember Forest Gump's buddy Bubba, talking about all the different kinds of shrimp dishes he knows? Shrimp creole, shrimp kebobs, shrimp sandwiches, shrimp soup, etc. etc? Well, today we're talking about the potato and I'm sure if we had the Irish equivalent of Bubba here, he could go on for pages about all the things you can do with a potato.

Baked potatoes, double stuffed baked potatoes, French fries, poutine, hash browns, mashed potatoes, fried potatoes, duchess potatoes, potato soup, potato rosti, potato pancakes, dauphinois potatoes, parisienne potatoes, lyonnaise potatoes, potato soufflé and of course, the one we are featuring today— potato croquettes.

The origin and history of the potato is a tale of false credit, thievery, economic boom and starvation. This terribly important vegetable probably originated in Chile.

It is thought that prehistoric tribes took the potato from Chile into the region of Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru, because a wild species grows there to this day. The South Americans had been cultivating the potato for centuries when the Spanish conquerors arrived.

In 1537, an expedition led by Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada first discovered the potato growing in a deserted village, high up in the Andes in Peru, along with corn

Lori Gysel & Gerry Kentner



and beans.

Probably the Spanish sailors took the potato back to Spain and Portugal in the mid-16th century although Sir Francis Drake is credited as discovering it in Chile and introducing it to England in 1577, while Sir Walter Raleigh first grew it in Ireland in 1585. The Indian name of pappas became batata in Spanish, then potato in English.

The Irish economy became dependent on the potato but, when blight attacked the crops of 1845/6, a dreadful famine was the result with many deaths. The survivors emigrated to North America and Australia.

German peasants were encouraged to cultivate potato in the mid-17th century. The French adopted it in the 18th century. The English were also slow to accept it as the Puritans distrusted a crop not mentioned in the Bible, however, by the 18th century it had become an important vegetable for the masses.

Have fun and keep cooking!



Potato Croquettes

Makes about 12
Ingredients

- 4 cups mashed potato
- 1/2 cup diced Spanish onion
- 2 eggs
- 1/3 cup flour
- salt and pepper
- 1 cup cornmeal (or 1 cup crushed cornflakes)
- peanut oil (in a large heavy pot— should be at least 2 inches deep)

Method

Mix potato, onion, one egg, salt and pepper together well. Form the potato mixture into 1-inch balls. Dip each ball in flour to coat lightly, shake off excess. Lightly beat the remaining egg. Dip the floured ball into the egg, then roll in the cornmeal or crumbs. Chill the potato croquettes at least half an hour to firm up before frying. Heat oil to medium high. Deep fry croquettes until slightly browned and floating. Drain on paper towels. Enjoy with butter, salt and pepper or on their own.

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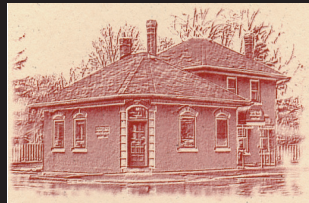
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