

Bread & Cheese Day



A large crowd at the arena in Ohsweken lines up for 2,000 loaves of bread and 2,400 pounds of cheddar cheese at the traditional gathering. Christopher Smith, Expositor Staff

Queen Victoria began ceremony that remains popular

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A tradition that dates back to Queen Victoria will unfold this weekend as Six Nations marks "Independence Day" with the annual distribution of bread and cheese.

At noon on Monday, thousands of Six Nations residents will line up at the Ohsweken Arena to receive their allotment of fresh bread and orange cheese.

The tradition started in the 1800s when Queen Victoria decided to recognize the people of Six Nations.

The tradition stopped when Victoria died but was started again in 1924 by the elected band council.

Popular belief is that the queen introduced the tradition to replace the more costly habit of giving natives blankets in appreciation of their loyalty to the crown.

However, others maintain the bread and cheese was a one-time gift from Queen Victoria who didn't want anyone to go hungry on her birthday.

Regardless of its origin, the event has become a popular annual Six Nations festival, complete with events and fireworks the day before and a parade leading up to the distribution of the food.

The annual Bread and Cheese Day drew thousands of people to the Six Nations Fairgrounds on Monday for the yearly handout of a chunk of cheese and a thick slice of fresh bread.

Williams said she has been attending the annual tradition since 1941, when the trip was an outing from the Mohawk Institute.

Over the years it has turned into a homecoming for her.

"(I come) for the camaraderie. For the meeting of people. For the renewing of old friendships. It's a great feeling to come out," she said.

And despite not being picky about the food, she said she does enjoy it. "The bread and cheese never tasted better."