

Donation of the Month

Butter Molds

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When you slather a piece of bread or a warm roll with butter, do you even think about why it looks the way it does or where it came from? Butter is one of those foods that has lasted the test of time and has gone through many different styles and forms. There are stories of butter being used in some form or another for 4,000 years!

The (Very) Basics of Butter

Butter is created by skimming the cream from fresh milk then churning the cream until the fats in it separate from the liquid and form a semi-solid substance that becomes butter. Various tools have been used over time to make and improve butter.

Butter for Sale

Butter molds like those shown here, come in different sizes, shapes, and designs. But what are they? As fresh butter became an established staple at the family table, butter-making in the home was a routine activity. By the mid and late 1800s, communities were growing larger and many people who moved into cities purchased their milk and butter from farm families. "Dairy butter" was a popular market item, and often makers used molds and stamps to decorate blocks or rounds of butter. Different styles and patterns existed and featured flowers, wheat, fruit, and sometimes the maker's initials or appropriate symbol. Wooden butter molds became widely produced as the dairy industry grew.

Stamped Butter

These four examples from the museum's collection show different kinds of molds used for stamping or shaping butter. Three have very similar construction; the bottom mold has one open end and a hole in the top. The round mold shown here has a wooden handle that is attached to a round wooden stamp. The

stamp is carved with a single strawberry and three leaves. This stamp fits into the round mold and the handle sticks out of the top. By moving the handle up, the mold can be fitted around a ball or block of fresh butter and then the handle is pressed down to press the stamp into the soft butter surface.

The square mold works the same as the round one only it has a square stamp with a single carved flower. The rectangular mold has no carved stamp; instead, it has a flat wooden piece that would form a solid block of butter. The last mold has a wooden handle and round glass stamp with a cow design. This stamp may have had another, large hollow mold like the others although the stamp could still be pressed into a block or ball of butter on its own. Eventually, as technology improved, butter was mass-produced, stamped and formed, and packaged by machines in large quantities rather than by hand with wooden or glass molds. However, molds and stamps were still used by those who made their own butter. Today, there are many recipes to make your own butter and if you happen to find some of these delightful molds, you too can decorate your table with whatever design you choose.

Credits: "Butter (History and Making of)" web exhibit from the Institute for Dynamic Educational Advancement (IDEA), <http://webexhibits.org/butter/index.html>. "How Butter is made" from The Butter Board at http://www.naturalandtasty.co.uk/how_butter_made.htm. "A Bit Butter Mold History..." from <http://www.cookie mold.com/57-Buttermolds.html>. Rogers Historical Museum Donor File and Research Library.