



DON'T CALL IT A POT PIE

WINSTON-SALEM'S MORAVIAN CURRENCY

by *Debbie Moose*

MORAVIAN CHICKEN pie isn't just comfort food. It's currency. At Moravian churches in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, the price of building fellowship halls, replacing copiers, or repairing sanctuary roofs has, for generations, been stated not in dollars but in chicken pies.

The chicken pie has become

such a part of food-related fundraising in the city that churches of all denominations hold sales. Some are once a year at holiday bazaars, others are year-round operations with commercial freezers and armies of volunteers.

Many sweet-toothed North Carolinians know about the Moravian treats that I grew up with in Winston-Salem—paper-thin

Illustration by Emily Wallace

Christmas cookies and yeasted sugar cake. The Moravian church began in an area that is now the Czech Republic. Members came to America to exercise religious freedom in the eighteenth century, bringing their baking traditions with them.

Unless you've spent time in Winston-Salem, it's unlikely you've ever heard of Moravian chicken pie. You might even say the heretical: "Oh, you mean chicken pot pie."

Do not ever call it pot pie unless you want some righteous wrath to come down on you.

Moravian chicken pie is simple: Line a pie pan with crust; add cooked chicken with broth or gravy; top with another crust; bake. No peas, carrots, onions, or other vegetables inside. Some cooks sprinkle a butter-flour crumble on the top crust or offer extra gravy for serving. But there's no gussying up the pie with herbs and such.

Moravian chicken pie is the humble laborer in the vineyard, providing warm, embracing meals for the table and support for the church treasuries.

Every cook insists that his or her way of making the pie is the best. Some churches use whole stewing hens, while others go with all white meat as a bow to current preferences. The whole-hen approach is probably closer to how chicken pie was originally

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prepared, according to researchers at Old Salem, the eighteenth-century restored Moravian settlement in Winston-Salem.

For frugal home cooks, chicken pie was the final fate of unproductive laying hens. Meat pies are made all over Europe, so it's reasonable to think that the early Moravians brought the idea with them. Historical recipes are scarce because cooks simply made chicken pie using what they had.

Records at the Moravian Archives in Winston-Salem show that chicken pie suppers as church fundraisers go back at least to 1920. Today, nearly every Moravian church in town holds a chicken pie sale sometime during the year, as do a good number of churches of other denominations. My mother, a Presbyterian, obtained her Moravian chicken pies from a United Methodist church, where volunteers still crank out up to 180 pies at a time to freeze and sell year-round.

Moravian chicken pie is ecumenically delicious. 🍷

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