



July is
National
Hot Dog
Month!

By Mark T. Bond

Hot Doggin'

Imagine Abbott without Costello. Imagine NYC without Lady Liberty. Imagine America without hot dogs. We, as a nation, believe our “Red Hots” are so unquestionably American that most never question their origin.

Though, as we ponder the alleged history of the frankfurter, it's equally interesting to consider how it has impacted our culture. Writings date back several centuries that mention stuffing animal intestines with meat and preparing them over a flame. For hundreds of years, this meat-on-a-stick never evolved beyond the fireside meal. Controversy surrounds the date and region credited with the creation of the contemporary “Dog”; however, most authorities agree that the honors go to Frankfurt, Germany in 1852...thus its Darwinian name-*frankfurter*.

Meat on a stick was an inevitable success along the German-cobbled roads. It was the first meal you could walk with, and its portability alone caused it to be a regional favorite. It's only speculation, however, but we've got to assume the refuse of castaway sticks soon became a problem in Deutschland. As the story goes, it was an enterprising young vendor who decided to serve his smoked sausages along with a linen glove to his patrons, thus enabling them to handle the grilled meat without burning one's hand. The gloves, however, were soon recognized as a needless expense. In a brainstorming session, over several pints of lager, our sausage vendor and a local baker devised a method by which one could not only hold this spicy morsel but eat it as well. It makes perfect sense to consider that Europeans of that time, rich in culinary wisdom, would seize on the opportunity to adorn this early sandwich with condiments, yet there is no such account.

An interesting parallel to establish here is that the sport of “Rounders” originated in Europe around this time. It was a game in which a small ball was hit with a wooden paddle and men ran around bases. Sound familiar?

And so, as immigrants of German descent landed upon our northeastern shores, they brought with them their fondness for frankfurters. One such gentleman, Charles Feltman, opened Feltman's Famous Restaurant, on Coney Island in 1874. New to America, the German sausages were, much like today, viewed with an equal mix of curiosity and suspicion. The myths survive as well that the secret meat contained within the natural or cellulose casings are pig snouts and chicken ass scraped from the boots of the butcher.

Industry standards certainly prevent such atrocities, and none of our furry friends are, in any form, contained therein, but that hasn't prevented people from poking fun at this unusual meal. It is claimed that the name ‘Hot Dog’ derived from similarities to a butcher's dachshund. From Frankfurter to dachshund sausage to wieners to red hots, it's no wonder we call them Hot Dogs; it's just a whole lot of fun.

It was in 1916 that Nathan Handwerker, a Feltman employee, started Nathan's Famous, Inc. At \$.05 a dog, they became standard fare for baseball games and world fairs. The ease of preparation, taste, and portability made them perfect for the American picnic.

The hot dog being introduced at the cusp of our technological renaissance may be viewed by some as mere coincidence. Take the wheel, for example, invented thousands of years ago and reconsidered for its useful applications, only in the age of the Hot Dog. Do you think Mrs. Ford could have called Henry to a sit-down meal away from his head scratching in his garage? Instead, a more likely scenario is, “Here, Hank...try one of these Hot Dogs...maybe you'll think of something.” Most are inclined to draw a direct association with the 16 billion hot dogs consumed annually with the advancements we've witnessed in the 20th century.

July is National Hot Dog Month, and it's time to celebrate. You can grill'em, fry'em, boil'em, or nuke'em. and the assortment of condiments continues to grow, as do the unusual ways to prepare and serve, long after Texan, Neil Fletcher, introduced us to corn dogs in the 40s.

In the Wallenpaupack region, Paulie's on Park Street in Honesdale and the Twist & Shake in Hawley admit that dogs are their famous fare. Their finely grilled red hots are a gastronomic delight while touring the area. Neither purveyor may reveal the mouth-watering array of herbs and spices that make their dogs unique, but if you're flying the Stars & Stripes with pride, you owe it to your country to stop by and give them a bite.