

Mixing Coffee To The Consistency Of Mortar

by Lynne Belluscio

I've never been much of a coffee drinker, although my mornings often begin with a stop at McDonald's for a cup of iced coffee – summer or winter. Growing up, I remember my father was just as happy to have a cup of instant coffee, since my mother never brewed coffee for him. My mother-in-law, on the other hand, had her trusty electric percolator, and made brewed coffee for breakfast and dinner.

This past summer, I spent a week on the Big Island of Hawaii and we visited the Kona Coffee Living History Farm. Friends of mine in the museum business had helped develop this historic site, and it was very interesting to learn about the production of coffee.

This particular area was home-steaded in the early 1900s and in the 1920s, Japanese immigrants arrived and began farming the small coffee plantations. The work was long and tedious. The beans had to be picked by hand and then dried in drying sheds before they could be sold by the bag. But Kona coffee gained a special reputation as a high quality, specialty coffee that today demands high prices. Only coffee raised in this particular place in Hawaii can carry the Kona label.

We were able to taste a wide variety of Kona coffees, and I have to admit, I discovered a wonderful coffee that wasn't bitter and that didn't need sugar and cream to be enjoyed. But not being a coffee connoisseur it would be a travesty for me to have this coffee on my shelf.

One of the most talked about recipes that folks experience at the open hearth dinners at my house, is the "boiled coffee." The recipe is based on an 1837 recipe from the Housekeeper's Book:

There are various recipes for preparing and refining coffee; the following is the best that has ever come under our view, and is available in all places. Procure your coffee fresh-roasted and not too brown, the proportion of a quarter of a pound for three persons. Let it be Mocha, and grind it just before using. Put it in a basin, and break into it an egg, yolk, white, shell and all. Mix it

up with a spoon to the consistence of mortar, place it with warm - - not boiling water in the coffee pot; let it boil up and break three times, then stand a few minutes and it will be as clear as amber, and the egg will give it a rich taste. -

Coffee made this way has a wonderful smooth mild taste. The eggs help to coagulate the grounds in the pot and keep them in a clump. The shells help clarify the coffee. A recipe from the *American Frugal Housewife* mentions that a piece of isenglas (sturgeon bladder – used to make a type of gelatin) or a piece of fish skin could be used instead of the eggs. (I've never used isenglas or fish skin, but suspect that they might impart a fish flavor.)

An article in *Civil War Times* by Kim O'Connell makes a case for the importance of coffee during the war. Soldiers were given rations of hard tack, pork or bacon, flour or bread, corn, beans and coffee. Sometimes the coffee beans were green and had to be roasted, but usually the beans were already roasted and just needed to be ground. The butt of a rifle was the usual way to pound the coffee beans, although it is interesting to note, that the Sharps Firearm Company manufactured a breech-loading rifle with a coffee grinder built into the stock. Soldiers were willing to give up their other rations – figuring that they could forage for some of the food, but they rarely agreed to give up their coffee.

Before the war, New Orleans was the port of entry for coffee, but the blockade shifted the ships from Costa Rica, Brazil, Java and Ceylon to New York. The irony was that the Union was fighting to save the Union and to abolish slavery, yet coffee – especially from Brazil was produced by



slaves under deplorable conditions. By 1864, the US government was buying 40 million pounds of coffee beans!

There were substitutes for coffee. During the Civil War, southern soldiers were not able to get coffee. Chicory was one of the options and I have read where roasted dandelion root could also produce a coffee-like drink. *The Frugal Housewife* published in 1832 included this comment about coffee substitu-

tions: "... some use dry brown bread crusts and roast them; others soak rye grain in rum and roast it; others roast peas in the same way as coffee. None of these are very good; and peas so used are considered unhealthy. Where there is a large family of apprentices and workmen, and coffee is very dear, it may be worthwhile to use the substitutes or to mix them half and half with coffee; but after all, the best economy is to go without."

SHOW OFF
 your corporate, club, or organization logo with any of these **COOL** promotional products...
 with many more to choose from!

LP Graphics
 1 Church Street, Le Roy NY
 585-768-2201
 lpgraphics.net