

Laffin 1
Greta Laffin
Professor Benjamin
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The Meal of Summertime: The Pasty

A home should be a sanctuary, somewhere you feel safe and at peace. Although my permanent residence is in Indiana and always has been, I treat Michigan more like my home, or better stated, my sanctuary. Specifically, I am referring to a small town in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan known as Cedarville. With an underwhelming population of only about 1,300 people, Cedarville serves as a serene getaway from the bustling life in Indiana. After a long nine months of being in school, my family and I escape to Michigan for the summer. Summers in Michigan are also where I accredit some of my fondest memories, even the simplest ones, such as sharing a meal with loved ones by the lake. Besides the typical cookouts and fish fries, one of my favorite traditional Michigan meals is a pasty. Considering Michigan as my “home,” naturally, the pasty has become a significant meal to me and has become a staple meal with my family. Pasties are described as a “meat pie,” essentially consisting of a pastry crust that is filled with meat, vegetables, and potatoes. Being a labor-intensive and remarkably filling meal, it’s one not eaten on a regular basis but more reserved for special occasions. The pasty began as a fan-favorite among Cornish miners in the Upper Peninsula. Brought by Cornish immigrants, the pasty became popular among miners and then the savory meal transcended into a northern Michigan staple.

Although the pasty is exclusive to Northern Michigan, it originated in Cornwall England. The purpose of the pasty during its time of origin was when “food became an art rather than roasting a hunk of meat on a stick” (History). Although there may not be an exact date attached to when the pasty was created, literature dating all the way back to the 1150s refers to pasties in their place of origin, Cornwall, England. A man known as Chretien de Troyes published many Arthurian romances for the Countess of Champagne, which mentions the pasty, “Next Guivret opened a chest and took out two pasties. ‘My friend,’ says he, ‘now try a little of these cold pasties And you shall drink wine mixed with water’”(History). Although the following literature does not explicitly state the creator of the pasty, it illustrates the rich history surrounding the pasty. The pasty’s primitive history shows how there is more depth to the dish itself, and the journey to becoming a northern Michigan staple was a prolonged process. The pasty officially made its way to the United States around the 1800s. Around the 1800s, copper mining in England began to be depleted of findings, so naturally, the Cornish miners migrated to an area with plentiful copper mining opportunities. Cornish miners were able to become well-established in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, finding ample worksites and applying their expertise to the area (Magnaghi). Expectedly, when the Cornish migrated to northern Michigan, they brought many of their own customs and traditions with them. One of the pivotal things brought with the Cornish was the pasty. The pasty quickly became very popular among the miners, since it was a small, portable meal, yet still a plenty filling meal. Another benefit of the pasty was it could be easily warmed up and would continue to stay warm for a long period of time. Being able to eat the pasty while working on the job site, it was truly the perfect meal for the miners. Although the pasty was brought by the Cornish, many of the other ethnic groups tried to reclaim the pasty as their own by adding different ingredients. Yet, with each modification of the pasty, two ingredients remained

consistent: potatoes and onions (History). With the decline of mining near the end of the 1800s, the pasty still remained popular and became a tradition for the Upper Peninsula. The recipe remains relatively unchanged today and can be found in several local businesses, which exclusively sell pasties. The numerous shops solely dedicated to making and selling pasties are a true testament to how significant pasties are to northern Michigan food culture.

The eight-hour car ride up to the lake is one I nearly have memorized, with several important milestones along the way. One of those milestones is a pasty shop right after you cross the Mackinac Bridge. The Mackinac Bridge connects the lower part of Michigan (downstate) to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Right after you cross over the 5-mile-long bridge, you're immediately transported to a much different scene than you witness downstate. The Upper Peninsula would be described as more remote and rustic. When you see clusters of cedar trees, the vast Lake Huron, the temperature dropping by at least ten degrees, and more importantly the numerous pasty shops, you know you have officially arrived in the Upper Peninsula. Since I was a month old, I have been making this trip up to Cedarville, and each time I'm just as anticipated to get up to the lake and start summer. It's difficult to exactly put into words the way being at the lake makes me feel, but I think the easiest way to describe it is I simply feel at peace while I am there. With no Wi-Fi and a spotty internet connection, being at the lake serves as a detox. For the two months of summer, I can finally disconnect from the stress and reality of life back home and just enjoy genuine time spent with loved ones. Cedarville specifically serves as such an important place to me not just because of the gorgeous lake that we spend all day exploring, but more significantly, how important it is to my family. After my dad experienced the tragic death of both of his parents at the young age of ten, he was adopted by my now grandma, Dorothy. My grandma is an embodiment of everything I wish to be one day. She was a Russian history professor at Indiana University, making her one of the smartest people I know. She is an extraordinarily independent woman, as she would travel by herself all the way up to her cabin on the island and was able to suffice for herself on an island. Above all, she is the kindest woman you will ever meet. Abruptly adopting my dad and my uncle is a true testament to her character. In hopes to give my dad and uncle a better childhood and an escape from the tragedies they have faced, she purchased the island cabin in Cedarville in 1980. The lake became a very special place for my dad, and this deeper love for the lake is evident when you hear my dad recount all the memories he has made here. Even after his childhood, he wanted to continue to spend his summers in Cedarville. In 1999, my parents bought my family's lake house. Now that my grandma has fallen ill and can no longer make her annual trips up to the cabin, going to the lake is much more significant for my family. We continue to go to the lake for her, since it was her sanctuary and special place. We continue to make fond memories with each other for her. Additionally, we continue to have pasty dinners for her, as that was her favorite summertime meal.

Introduced by the Cornish miners in the 1800s, the pasty still continues to be popular in the Upper Peninsula and essentially became "the meal" for the area. I was first introduced to the pasty by my grandma because it was her favorite meal to have at the lake. Although, for those who have never been to the Upper Peninsula, the pasty is unknown and possibly confused with the description of someone unhealthily pale. This type of pasty is pronounced as PASS-TEA. Yet, those who live in the Upper Peninsula or have visited are very familiar with the pasty, as it's a food staple for the area, with almost every restaurant in the UP including it on their menu. The pasty serves as a cultural mark for the area and holds much importance to many, including myself. For several reasons, the dish is significant, since there

is so much history surrounding the pasty. A former line cook of one of the pasty restaurants, David Livermore explained how his great-grandfather was an immigrant who worked at the copper mines in the UP. He described how the pasty connects him to his ancestors and his hometown. Livermore further stated about eating the pasty, "It was like tasting a bit of history" (Wisti). Although I do not have a personal connection to the history of the pasty, it's significant to me because of the memories associated with the meal. Every summer, my mom, with help from aunts, friends, my sister, and myself, will bake several pasties to all be shared. Livermore can attest to the labor and time consumed by baking pasties. My mom will dedicate at least an entire day to just baking pasties for everyone. In order to make a successful pasty, there needs to be a perfect flakey, buttery crust and equal proportions of all the filling ingredients. Although I may be biased, my mom makes the best pasty I have ever had, and everyone else who has tasted my mom's cooking would agree with that statement. I believe her meticulous work and making them all with love adds an extra something special to her pasties. Her hard work in the kitchen always pays off and is much appreciated by all her consumers. Our family's pasty dinners are always much loved by everyone. It wouldn't be a complete and successful summer in Michigan without a pasty.

Although the pasty is an important meal to me, it's the only one that feels truly special while at the lake with family and friends. The flaky pastry with meat filling is so much more than the meal itself, it holds sentimental value to my family and me. A pasty never tastes quite right eaten anywhere except by the lake. Therefore, it's reserved for only the summertime, and it's the summertime staple meal.

Works Cited

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