Posted at 06:30 AM ET, 07/23/2010 from the Washington Post

**The history of ice cream (July is National Ice Cream Month)**

*By Valerie Strauss*

I love history. I love ice cream (and so did George Washington and Thomas Jefferson and, of course, Dolley Madison). So, to mark National Ice Cream Month, for which we have Ronald Reagan to thank, here is the history of ice cream. It's more interesting than you might think and even your kids might like it.

[As told by the International Dairy Foods Association,](http://www.idfa.org/news--views/media-kits/ice-cream/the-history-of-ice-cream/) the origins of ice cream date back to the 2nd century B.C. Alexander the Great liked snow and ice flavored with honey and nectar. Marco Polo returned to Italy from the Far East more than a thousand years later with a recipe that resembles modern sherbet.

France was introduced to similar frozen desserts in 1553 by the Italian Catherine de Medici when she became the wife of Henry II of France, but it wasn't until 1660 that ice cream was made available to the general public. The Sicilian Procopio introduced a recipe blending milk, cream, butter and eggs at Café Procope, the first café in Paris.

So what about ice cream in the United States?

The first known official reference comes from a letter written in 1744 by a guest of Maryland Gov. William Bladen, and the first ice cream advertisement appeared in the New York Gazette on May 12, 1777, when confectioner Philip Lenzi announced that ice cream was available "almost every day."

Records kept by a Chatham Street, N.Y., merchant show that President George Washington spent approximately $200 for ice cream during the summer of 1790. Inventory records of Mount Vernon taken after Washington's death revealed "two pewter ice cream pots." President Thomas Jefferson was said to have a favorite 18-step recipe for an ice cream delicacy that resembled a modern-day Baked Alaska.

And in 1813, Dolley Madison served a magnificent strawberry ice cream creation at President Madison's second inaugural banquet at the White House.

Around 1800, insulated ice houses were invented. Manufacturing ice cream soon became an industry in America, pioneered in 1851 by a Baltimore milk dealer named Jacob Fussell.

Like other American industries, ice cream production increased because of technological innovations, including steam power, mechanical refrigeration, the homogenizer, electric power and motors, packing machines, and new freezing processes and equipment.

In addition, motorized delivery vehicles dramatically changed the industry. Due to ongoing technological advances, today's total frozen dairy annual production in the United States is more than 1.6 billion gallons.

In 1874, the American soda fountain shop and the profession of the "soda jerk" emerged with the invention of the ice cream soda. In response to religious criticism for eating "sinfully" rich ice cream sodas on Sundays, ice cream merchants left out the carbonated water and invented the ice cream "Sunday" in the late 1890s. The name was eventually changed to "sundae" to remove any connection with the Sabbath.

Ice cream became an edible morale symbol during World War II. Each branch of the military tried to outdo the others in serving ice cream to its troops. In 1945, the first "floating ice cream parlor" was built for sailors in the western Pacific. When the war ended, and dairy product rationing was lifted, America celebrated its victory with ice cream. Americans consumed over 20 quarts of ice cream per person in 1946.

In the 1940s through the ‘70s, ice cream production was relatively constant in the United States. As more prepackaged ice cream was sold through supermarkets, traditional ice cream parlors and soda fountains started to disappear. Now, of course, specialty ice cream stores and unique restaurants that feature ice cream dishes have surged in popularity.

In 1984, then President Ronald Reagan designated July as National Ice Cream Month.

Here's the [official proclamation](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Proclamation_5219):

*Ice cream is a nutritious and wholesome food, enjoyed by over ninety percent of the people in the United States. It enjoys a reputation as the perfect dessert and snack food. Over eight hundred and eighty-seven million gallons of ice cream were consumed in the United States in 1983.*

*The ice cream industry generates approximately $3.5 billion in annual sales and provides jobs for thousands of citizens. Indeed, nearly ten percent of all the milk produced by the United States dairy farmers is used to produce ice cream, thereby contributing substantially to the economic well-being of the Nation's dairy industry.*

*The Congress, by Senate Joint Resolution 298, has designated July 1984 as "National Ice Cream Month," and July 15, 1984, as "National Ice Cream Day," and authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation in observance of these events.*

*Now, Therefore, I, Ronald Reagan, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim July 1984 as National Ice Cream Month and July 15, 1984, as National Ice Cream Day, and I call upon the people of the United States to observe these events with appropriate ceremonies and activities.*

*In Witness Whereof I have hereunto set my hand this ninth day of July, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eightyfour, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and ninth.*

**RONALD REAGAN**

Today, the U.S. ice cream industry generates more than $21 billion in annual sales and provides jobs for thousands of citizens. About 9 percent of all the milk produced by U.S. dairy farmers is used to produce ice cream, contributing significantly to the economic well-being of the nation's dairy industry.

Now go have an ice cream cone.
-0-