



During Twelfth Night festivities celebrating the Christian Epiphany, whoever finds a token in their slice of cake is named king for the day. Originally the tokens were edible, but over time they took more permanent forms, as in this assortment of twentieth-century ceramic Twelfth Night charms from France. PRIVATE COLLECTION / ARCHIVES CHARMET / BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

is iced in purple, green, and gold, the colors of Mardi Gras. See **NEW ORLEANS**. In England, color is less important than location: since 1796, a cake has been cut every twelfth night by the cast of the currently running play *Twelfth Night* at London's Theatre Royal, thanks to a bequest by actor Robert Baddeley (1733–1794).

The hidden bean—known as a *fève* in French and *monito* or *sorpresa* in Spanish—can vary as much as the cake. The original broad bean, its form symbolic of a human embryo, was sometimes superseded by an almond. Either might be swallowed on purpose as part of the ritual. This practice changed once charms were made of more permanent materials, such as porcelain and metal. Babies, representing the Christ child, and depictions of the Three Wise Men, were the most common. In seventeenth-century England, printed-paper tokens became popular. When King Cake tokens morphed into lucky charms for English birthday, wedding, and Halloween cakes, they were often made of lead or silver. American Mardi Gras cakes increasingly used plastic babies, which are the most common today.

Ironically, it is the French, who had all but abandoned the Twelfth Night cake by the 1950s, who have become the twenty-first-century's *fève* fanatics (*fabophiles*), supporting a Musée de la Fève near

Nantes with 20,000 examples of beans and charms, annual collectors' fairs in both Paris and Blain, and the last manufacturer of china tokens, Les Fèves de Clamecy, in Burgundy. Only one French citizen is barred from receiving a *fève* in his cake: the nation's president. So his *galette des rois* is baked *sans fève*.

See also **BREADS**, **SWEET** and **CHRISTIANITY**.

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**Twinkies**, officially Hostess Twinkies, the small, mass-marketed, extra-sweet, oily, packaged snack cakes, have one of the most recognizable brand names in American consumer product history. Infamous for their 45-day shelf life, and for the long list of artificial ingredients making that shelf life possible, Twinkies are known to many as the epitome of processed food. Fittingly, the Twinkies label touts color and texture, not flavor or taste, with a banner proclaiming "Golden sponge cake with creamy filling."

Foodies may deride them, but Twinkies sell by the hundreds of millions every year, as they have for generations.

If the president of the United States decides a sweet snack cake is important, then it must be so: President Bill Clinton included a Twinkie in the millennium time capsule in 1999. When Twinkies' longtime corporate owners, Interstate Bakeries Corporation, went bankrupt in 2012, almost every major media outlet featured the story. It was big, national news. And when private equity firms Apollo Global Management and C. Dean Metropoulos and Company paid \$410 million for the rights to Twinkies (and their chocolate siblings Ding Dongs and Ho Hos, among others), and then brought the snack cakes back to life in July 2013 with a nostalgia-based marketing campaign, that comeback story once again garnered headlines in every major media outlet around the country. Money talks. Twinkies matter. No other snack cake is as significant, well known, beloved, hated, or celebrated both as a cultural icon and symbol of everything wrong with our food habits as Hostess Twinkies.

Other snack cakes, such as Little Debbie Golden Cremes, may sell in larger numbers, use pretty much the same ingredients, and strive for a similarly long shelf life, but rival confections somehow lack Twinkie's aura. See LITTLE DEBBIE. Is it because they are so famous? The men's magazine *Maxim* once ran an article on five tough guys in movies who eat and love Twinkies, including a monster, a cop, a ghost buster, a zombie killer, and Genghis Khan, despite his having been dead for about 800 years. No other snack cake can make that claim. And let us not forget that tough guy Archie Bunker, the main character in *All In The Family*, one of the longest-running, most popular TV shows in history, had a Twinkie in his lunch bag every day. More recently, Twinkies gained notoriety in the successful "Twinkie defense" of Dan White, accused in 1978 of murdering San Francisco mayor George Moscone and fellow city supervisor Harvey Milk. White's lawyer successfully argued for White's temporary insanity based on his overconsumption of junk food, convincing the jury to charge him on the lesser count of manslaughter.

Despite frequently negative press, Twinkies remain uniquely iconic and beloved among American snack cakes. Not too bad for a Midwestern confection, invented in the Chicago suburb of Schiller Park in

1930 by James A. Dewar, manager of the Continental Baking Company. Hoping to find a year-round use for the shortcake pans used only during strawberry season, Dewar injected banana cream into the shortcake batter, and Twinkies were born. During World War II, when bananas were in short supply, the company substituted vanilla cream, which has remained the filling ever since.

Twinkies became popular thanks to two forces: television advertising and post-World War II chemistry. In the 1950s, ubiquitous TV ads promoted Twinkies as a proper dessert and even as a healthy snack, "full of protein to grow on." Twinkies were a major sponsor of the first widely viewed and influential children's TV show, *The Howdy Doody Show*, which prompted mothers to include the snack cakes in just about every daily lunch box in America. Many baby boomers today look back at that show as their introduction to Twinkies and TV. At the same time, there was increasing consumer demand for more processed, convenient foods. Food product manufacturers responded by using new chemicals and finding new uses for the older chemicals widely available after World War II as the chemical industry ceased its high level of wartime production. The TV advertising tag line "Better living through chemistry" was a familiar household phrase in the early 1950s, and the concept of a non-spoiling, cheap dessert cake appealed greatly to Americans.

This convenience food trend translated into the development and availability of low-cost ingredients that reduced the cost of processed foods while creating the possibility of food types that had not existed before, such as TV dinners. Twinkies are typical of highly processed foods that rely on artificial ingredients for their shelf life and low cost. Cakes stored at room temperature are fertile ground for microorganisms, mainly because of the dairy products in their frosting and fillings. And while we don't know the exact recipe for the original, 1930s-era Twinkies, they were notable for two things the contemporary version lacks: they incorporated fresh ingredients (cream, butter, and eggs), and they spoiled after only a few days on the shelf. Until the introduction of artificial ingredients, salesmen had to remove unsold Twinkies every few days.

That drive for longer shelf life led to a reliance on alternatives to dairy products and eggs. By the early 2000s, Twinkies included such ingredients as polysorbate 60 (a gooey egg-yolk substitute), cellulose

gum (a moisture binder and fat substitute), sodium stearoyl lactylate/mono and diglycerides (cream substitutes), and sorbic acid (the lone preservative in Twinkies)—among an impressive 39 ingredients and sub-ingredients. Some of those sub-ingredients are surprisingly artificial: the vitamins in the enriched flour are made primarily from Chinese petroleum or in Chinese fermentation labs, not, as one might expect, from ground-up berries, roots, or bark. In the future, we can perhaps expect to see the inverse in a new breed of Twinkies, as the new marketers might add fiber, go gluten free, or create low-sugar options in what has previously been beloved for

being a decadent treat. For now, the little Twinkie stands as a symbolic dividing line between those who prefer fresh and whole and those who simply want their sweets sweet and cheap.

See also HOSTESS; SMALL CAKES; and UNITED STATES.

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