

# Pulman's culinary legacy

Perfectly rectilinear bread loaves were a fixture on rail cars

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Special Tribune Newspapers

If you traveled by rail at the end of the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th, you may have been part of the glittering clientele from business, arts, politics and leisure who crossed the country in style in a Pullman car. You wore your Sunday best, because that was the style of the day, while you sipped a cocktail in the club car, watching America's greatest farming and dairy regions slide by.

That era was brought into focus recently when President Barack Obama announced that Chicago's Pullman neighborhood, where the rail cars were built, has been designated a national monument. Along with the historic elements of the company town, the architecturally significant buildings and the labor unrest, one can point to a worthy culinary legacy associated with the newest national monument: perfectly rectangular loaves of Pullman bread.

In 1868, Pullman Palace Car Co. rolled out a luxurious new dining car that was devoted exclusively to preparing and serving food to passengers. Called the Delmonico, after the famous New York restaurant, the car offered little tables for four with the kind of well-appointed linens, crystal, silver and china worthy of fine restaurants of the day.

Because excellent food was an effective way to attract business, cooks onboard were sure to select the very best of the region's products. For travelers moving through the greatest cattle-raising areas of the country where ready access to the Nebraska stockyards prevailed, beefsteak was surely the perennial favorite on the bill of fare.

African-American men from the South were hired by the Pullman Co. as porters, hastening the Great Migration and offering opportunity to those escaping Jim Crow oppression.

## Finding the pans

Pullman bread pans (aka pan de mie pans) are available at many cooking stores; try Sur La Table and Williams-Sonoma. They are also available online at: [williams-sonoma.com](http://williams-sonoma.com), [amazon.com](http://amazon.com), [bedbathandbeyond.com](http://bedbathandbeyond.com), [jcpenney.com](http://jcpenney.com), [kingarthurfour.com](http://kingarthurfour.com), [kohls.com](http://kohls.com)

A long-aproned server handed you the menu: 13 entrees, six kinds of game, a choice of 25 desserts, including pies baked fresh by the chef en route, and your choice of bread. Selections were plenty: dry toast, Vienna bread, corn bread, buttered bread and milk toast.

The basic fine-grained white soft-roll loaf that Pullman bread was baked in a special pan with a sliding metal cover that was closed during baking. Since the dough was contained in the long, rectangular pan, it didn't expand to have beveled sides and a rounded top.

With its luxuriously crustless flat top, delicate texture, fine crumb and good flavor, Pullman bread was considered by connoisseurs to be something of a crown jewel. But today it certainly wouldn't shine like one. Artisanal baking has trained the American eye and palate to a crusty rounded top and an airy-crumb interior.

Those square, white bread from the days was essential for professional-looking canapés, appetizers, fancy sandwiches and toast. Though the baking pan that yields those perfectly symmetrical loaves carries the name Pullman, the bread existed long before the rail car company.

By the early 18th century, according to the late food historian Elizabeth David in "English Bread and Yeast Cookery," the French were baking sandwich loaves "in tins, provided with a sliding cover so that almost crustless tops and perfectly even shapes are



MICHAEL THERCHA/TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS; LISA SCHUMACHER/FOOD STYLING  
Pullman loaves make great sandwiches. For a raisin version, go to [chicago Tribune.com/pullmanbread](http://chicago Tribune.com/pullmanbread).

## Pullman bread

**Prep:** 25 minutes **Rise:** 1 hour, 30 minutes **Bake:** 40 minutes **Makes:** 1 loaf, about 20 slices

When baked in a Pullman pan, this recipe makes a loaf with a large, square slice. The recipe originally appeared in "Baker's Bread" by Paul Richards (The Baker's Helper Co., Chicago, 1906) and was adapted by PJ Hamel, baker/blogger and Web producer at King Arthur Flour. You will need a Pullman loaf pan with a sliding cover. Two sizes are available. This recipe is for a small pan, 9 inches long by 4 inches wide and 4 inches high.

- 1 1/2 teaspoons yeast
- 1 1/2 cups warm water
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 4 cups bread flour
- 2 1/2 tablespoons lard
- 1 to 1 1/2 teaspoons salt

**1** Sprinkle the yeast in a medium bowl; pour 1/2 cup warm water over the yeast. Add 1 tablespoon sugar.

**2** Allow the yeast to bloom in the water until the water begins to foam, 5-7 minutes.

**3** Place the flour, remaining 1 tablespoon sugar, remaining 1 1/2 cups water, lard and salt in the bowl of a stand mixer equipped with a dough hook. Add the yeast mixture. Mix on low until a dough forms. Turn speed to medium; mix, 8-10 minutes.

**4** Place the kneaded dough in a lightly greased bowl; 1/2 cover with plastic wrap and let rise in a warm, draft-free place until doubled in bulk, 1 to 1 1/2 hours.

**5** Heat the oven to 350 degrees. Punch down the dough; knead on a lightly floured work surface, 30 seconds. Shape the dough into a log. Place dough in a lightly greased Pullman loaf pan; cover with plastic wrap and allow to rise until the dough has almost reached the top edge of the pan, about 30 minutes. (Watch closely so that the dough does not overproof.) Carefully remove the plastic; slide the metal cover closed.

**6** Bake, about 40 minutes. Remove the lid in the last 5 minutes of baking. The bread is done when an instant-read thermometer inserted into the center registers 190 degrees. Turn the loaf out onto a rack to cool completely before slicing.

**Nutrition information per slice:** 168 calories, 2 g fat, 1 g saturated fat, 1 mg cholesterol, 21 g carbohydrates, 3 g protein, 17 mg sodium, 2 g fiber

achieved." Called *pain de mie* (mie meaning crumb, because the crumb or inside was more important than the crust), it was the bread of choice for croissants, white bread crumbs, canapés, sandwiches and toast served with tea.

David Duncan, general manager of the Pullman Sleeping Car Co., said "the pan, to me, existed

long before Pullman because it makes a perfectly shaped loaf. You put a certain size weight of dough in the pan. This way you always get the same loaf, with uniform slices." That standard was important to the rail car company. If you got on a Pullman car and rode New York to Chicago, and then rode one out west, they wanted to be sure everything on board was

the same, with the exception of specialty foods of the region.

Today you can experience that same era of first-class dining through Pullman Rail Journeys ([travelpullman.com](http://travelpullman.com)), which operates some 200 of the refurbished cars. Or you can bake Pullman loaves yourself for the cost of one specialty pan and some flour.