



Baking in America

*Traditional and Contemporary Favorites
from the Past 200 Years*

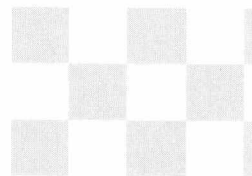
Greg Patent



AMERICA

from the Past 200 Years

GREG PATENT



*For Dorothy,
always*

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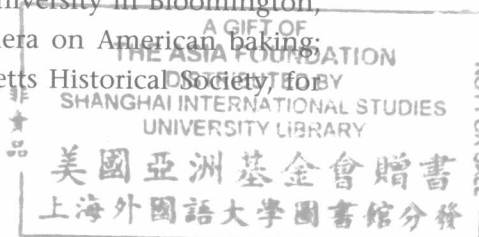
Acknowledgments

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providing copies of historical Parker House menus; the New York Public Library, for opening its menu collection to me; Constance Malpas, of the New York Academy of Medicine, for allowing me to rummage through its old cookbook and menu collections; Barbara Haber, of the Schlesinger Library at Harvard University, for making it possible for me to visit the Baker Library; Ellen Shea, of the Schlesinger, for assistance in research on the Boston Cream Pie; and Barbara Wheaton, also of the Schlesinger, for making so many well-catalogued boxes of ephemera available to me.

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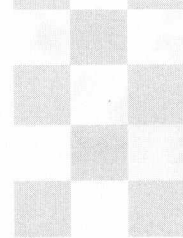
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INTRODUCTION

America's love affair with baking stretches back only two hundred years, yet in this relatively brief period we've developed a large and varied tradition rivaling that of countries that have been around for thousands of years. Where did all these recipes come from? I became fascinated by this question as I leafed through *Seventy-Five Receipts, for Pastry, Cakes, and Sweetmeats* in the cozy wood-paneled rare book room of the Los Angeles Public Library. There, in the earliest American baking book, written in 1828 by Eliza Leslie ("A Lady of Philadelphia"), an unusual recipe called Indian Pound Cake grabbed my attention:

Eight eggs.

The weight of eight eggs in powdered sugar.

The weight of six eggs in Indian meal, sifted.

Half a pound of butter.

One nutmeg, grated—or a tea-spoonful of cinnamon.

Stir the butter and sugar to a cream. Beat the eggs very light. Stir the meal and eggs, alternately, into the butter and sugar. Grate in the nutmeg. Stir all well. Butter a tin pan, put in the mixture, and bake it in a moderate oven.

Pound cake, a traditional English cake normally made with fine white flour, had been transformed into something new by the substitution of an authentic American ingredient, cornmeal, known at the time as Indian meal, for the flour. And it was flavored with an entire nutmeg to boot. Intrigued, I wondered what the texture would be like. And would the nutmeg overwhelm the flavor? I couldn't wait to get into the kitchen to find out.

My first attempt didn't work because the regular supermarket cornmeal I used was too coarse, making the cake heavy and gritty. When I switched to fine cornmeal, however, the cake had a deliciously complex texture, tender yet a bit toothsome, the nutmeg adding a marvelous aroma and a not-too-strong spiciness. I was hooked. I searched through other nineteenth-century cookbooks and found many more Indian pound cake recipes. Some were flavored with rose water, or with brandy, or both. Rose water, the distilled extract of rose petals, contributed a floral aroma and flavor, and when I added brandy as well, the taste was exquisite. (Try the recipe on page 180 and you'll see what I mean.)

Baking the almost two-hundred-year-old recipe made me feel an unexpected

kinship with Miss Leslie. It was as if she were with me in my kitchen. Past and present coexisted. What other treasures, I wondered, might I find by delving into old cookbooks? Would I be as successful at resurrecting them as I had been with the Indian Pound Cake?

In reading rooms from Los Angeles to Cambridge, Massachusetts, I pored over historic cookbooks, diaries, pamphlets, and old newspapers. My research stretched from the earliest American cookbook, *American Cookery*, by Amelia Simmons—fittingly published a mere twenty years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence—through the first decade or so of the Pillsbury Bake-Off, a cooking contest inaugurated in 1949 that illustrates the ingenuity of American cooks during the last half of the twentieth century. I discovered that from the beginning, American women had created an extraordinary variety of savory and sweet baked goods. Over and over again, I encountered recipes for breads and desserts I had never heard of before: Composition Cake, Silver Cake, Pennsylvania Dutch Tea Rolls, Boston Cream Cakes. Why, I wondered, had these delicious-sounding recipes disappeared from twentieth-century cookbooks? I decided to bake them to see for myself. I soon found that these extinct recipes are as appealing and contemporary today as they were a hundred or more years ago. The Boston Cream Cakes were a revelation: crisp sugar-glazed cream puffs with an especially tender interior and filled with a rich, velvety baked custard flavored with a vanilla bean and cinnamon stick. Made from a buttery, sweet yeast dough, the Pennsylvania Dutch Tea Rolls have an especially light and tender texture.

The old cookbooks I spent my days with were much more than a rich source of recipes. Many contained advice on how to shop, design, furnish a kitchen, and manage servants. And, at a time when medicine was in its infancy, almost all cookbooks gave medical advice and provided recipes for the sick room. These cookbooks were windows on how people lived, and as I baked my way through the recipes, I discovered I was at the same time retracing history.

Like their British ancestors, Americans were terrific bakers, expanding on centuries-old traditions that had been established in Europe. (Just how much Americans used to bake is clear from the fact that in 1900, 95 percent of all flour in America was purchased for home use, compared to just 15 percent in 1970.) Equipment in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American kitchens was primitive by today's standards—the rotary egg beater wasn't invented until 1870—yet somehow these women managed to make everything we do today: yeast breads, quick breads, all kinds of cakes, cookies, pies, and tarts, even cheesecakes. In that first slim volume

of sixty-four pages, for example, Amelia Simmons included more than fifty recipes for baked goods, demonstrating that baking was the primary culinary tradition of this country.

Unlike previous cookbooks, which were merely reprints of books printed in England and featuring English ingredients and cooking methods, *American Cookery* presented American ingredients and addressed the needs and desires of the American housewife, with recipes “adapted to this country and all grades of life.” Miss Simmons’s message was implicitly democratic: anyone can do this. Each of the approximately 250 recipes I’ve included in this book shows the hallmarks of American baking that she set forth: simplicity, straightforwardness, and experimentation.

Some of the oldest recipes I found, those for sweet and savory breads, date to the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when baking was done almost exclusively in a brick oven alongside the fireplace. These breads were nearly always leavened with yeast. One of the most popular loaves of the period, Third Bread, a crusty, dense bread, was made with equal amounts of wheat, rye, and cornmeal. The substitution of cheaper rye flour and cornmeal for most of the wheat was common practice. Wheat remained expensive until the 1860s, when wheat growing and milling became established in the Midwest. Wheat, Rye, and Indian Bread (page 66) is my re-creation of the old staple Third Bread. Another example of American ingenuity in the kitchen is Rice Bread, a delightfully chewy loaf, in which some of the costly wheat flour was replaced by rice, which was plentiful in the South’s Low Country.

Early cookbooks also revealed many delicious examples of sweet yeast breads. Election Cake, a yeast cake made with raisins and dried currants that dates back to the 1600s, was so good that it was supposedly used to bribe voters. In my version (page 118), I’ve kept the traditional dough but improvised by adding a variety of dried fruits not available to

A HINT TO THE WORKING CLASSES

If a man, twenty-one years of age, began to save a dollar a week, and put it to interest every year, he would have, at thirty-one years of age, six hundred and fifty dollars; at forty-one, one thousand six hundred and eighty; at sixty-one, six thousand one hundred and fifty; and at seventy-one, eleven thousand five hundred dollars. When we look at these sums, and when we think how much temptation and evil might be avoided in the very act of saving them, and how much good a man in humble circumstances might do for his family by these sums, we cannot help wondering that there are not more savers of one dollar a week.

—Mrs. E. A. Howland,

The New England Economical Housekeeper (1846)

our ancestors. Who knows, you might be able to swing a few votes for your favorite candidate with it!

Mildly spiced nonyeasted loaf cakes, packed with dried currants, raisins, and citron, sweetened and made dark with molasses, were also extremely popular in nineteenth-century American homes. The poet Emily Dickinson was renowned for her Black Cake, a delicious confection that I've resurrected in the fervent hope it will restore fruitcake's good name (see page 206). Doughnuts—balls of deep-fried sweet yeast bread dough—are a venerable tradition that came to us from the Dutch. One quintessentially American doughnut that I happened upon, called Little Pittsburghs, were great favorites with the hungry miners of Leadville, Colorado, who paid a dime apiece for them and gobbled them down with glasses of dried-apple cider.

From the time *American Cookery* appeared in 1796 to the mid-1800s, American bakers, showing a zest for saving time that continues to this day, experimented with various chemical leaveners. The first was pearl ash (potassium carbonate), then came saleratus (sodium carbonate) and baking soda (sodium bicarbonate). When baking powder arrived in the late 1850s, yeast breads rapidly gave way to quick breads, and the traditional leaveners, eggs and yeast, were abandoned in favor of chemical ones. An advertisement in an 1856 edition of the *Boston Daily Evening Transcript* touted the virtues of baking powder, called "nutritive yeast powder" by its manufacturers: "We introduce this new article to the public with the greatest confidence that it will be found the best and cheapest to rise bread, hot biscuits, griddle cakes, and all kinds of sweet

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Wheat Flour, one pound is one quart.

Indian Meal, one pound two ounces is one quart.

Butter, when soft, one pound is one quart.

White Sugar powdered, one pound one ounce is one quart.

Best Brown Sugar, one pound two ounces is one quart.

Liquids

Sixteen large table-spoonfuls are half a pint.

Eight " " " are one gill.

Four " " " are half a gill, or one glass.

Twenty-five drops are equal to one tea-spoonful.

A common wine-glass to half a gill.

A common tumbler to half a pint.

—Mrs. E. A. Howland, *The New England Economical Housekeeper* (1846)

cakes, gingerbreads, etc. Bread made with this powder requires no saleratus or soda, and no time to rise."

Is it any wonder baking powder proved to be irresistible to the harried housewife?

Over time she exercised her penchant for experimentation by incorporating produce from her garden—carrots, pumpkin, zucchini—into quick breads. She also varied her breads by adding dried currants, raisins, coconut, or fresh berries to loaves and muffins. Dense fruit cakes, which kept well, were now shunned in favor of cakes made puffy and light with the newfangled leaveners. Even old-fashioned pound cakes were "improved upon" by cutting back on the eggs, reducing the beating time, and lightening their textures with baking powder or baking soda.

The invention of baking powder as well as other innovations in the kitchen made possible the rise of tall, glamorous layer cakes. At first glance, these fancy cakes would seem to be at odds with the American spirit of simplicity seen in the plainer loaf cakes and pound cakes of earlier eras, but they are the culmination of the American fascination with speed and ease. The chocolaty, fluffy Devil's Food Cake I found while leafing through a promotional pamphlet for shortening and the light, tender Orange Chiffon Cake that was created by an ingenious California insurance salesman in the 1920s show that by the twentieth century, the American kitchen had taken a giant leap forward.

Time-saving kitchen equipment and utensils like electric refrigerators, freezers, ovens with reliable thermostats, and especially electric mixers allowed women to bake many more cakes than they had in the past and make them taller and fluffier too.

One such cake, the classic Lady Baltimore Cake, a spectacularly high three-layer cake spread with a sugary walnut filling between the layers and frosted with a billowy, white icing made by beating egg whites and sugar over boiling water, became a favorite in Charleston, South Carolina, in the first decade of the 1900s. Another impressively tall and delicious cake I found, the four-layer Chocolate and Gold Ribbon Cake, a prize winner originally called Regency Ribbon Cake from the Pillsbury Bake-Off in 1955, is filled and frosted with a luxuriously smooth chocolate icing. You'll find both these cakes in this book.

When it came to ingredients, American bakers again proved themselves to be innovators rather than hidebound traditionalists. Instead of making her piecrusts with simple mixtures of flour, butter, and water, Amelia Simmons added eggs. And rather than confining herself to the traditional English pie fillings of apples, apri-

RECIPE OR RECEIPT?

Most nineteenth-century cookbooks use the word “receipt” instead of “recipe.” There are *Miss Leslie’s New Receipts for Cooking*; *The Godey’s Lady’s Book Receipts*; *Seventy-Five Receipts, for Pastry Cakes, and Sweetmeats*; and so on. How did “recipe” ultimately triumph over “receipt”?

Jessup Whitehead, author of several cookbooks in the late 1800s and influential food columnist for Chicago’s *Daily National Hotel Reporter*, summed up the conflicting usage of the day in the seventh edition of *The American Pastry Cook*:

Of half a dozen different articles on the grocer’s shelves, four have recipes printed on the packages while others give receipts. Of six persons talking together, four or five will say recipe, the rest receipt. The label on the bottle tells you that the sauce beside your plate was prepared from the receipt of a nobleman of the county. But the nobleman’s only authoritative English cook-book uses recipe. . . . Both words are right, but which is better?

After using the word “recipe” in hundreds of pages of his column, Mr. Whitehead eventually decided to buck the tide and opt for “receipt” instead. His choice boiled down to the number of syllables. In Mr. Whitehead’s view, it was pretentious to use three syllables when two would do.

In making his decision, he cited Harpers, which had just published a cookbook he considered especially authoritative. It made “extreme correctness a special feature. . . . It was typographically perfect. It hyphenated every cocoanut. It split hairs on teaspoonful . . . and adopted receipt instead of recipe.” Mr. Whitehead concluded, “There was no more room for doubt. Higher precedent there could not be, and so, if the reader pleases, as far as this column is concerned, we will render unto the doctors the Latin tri-syllable which is theirs, and use only the humbler but safer English receipt.”

cots, cherries, gooseberries, lemons, and oranges, she boldly incorporated the new fruits and berries she found in America: cranberries, currants, grapes, peaches, quince, and pumpkin. Since then, of course, the variations dreamed up by American bakers in both crusts and fillings—from Hazelnut Streusel Sweet Potato Pie to Blueberry Pie with Amaretti Crust—have confirmed the national love of experimentation.

The willingness of the American baker to embrace new ingredients intensified in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and is nowhere more apparent than in the

cookie recipes that began to proliferate then. The most famous example is the all-time favorite chocolate chip cookie, invented in the 1930s by an enterprising innkeeper named Ruth Wakefield, who tossed chopped chocolate into her cookie dough when she'd run out of walnuts. (Until the 1880s, chocolate was almost exclusively used as a beverage in the home.) Oatmeal and peanuts, two of our most beloved additions to cookies today, were originally used for animal feed until the Civil War. Since Ruth Wakefield's time, cooks have outdone her by incorporating a host of new ingredients into chocolate chip cookies: candied ginger, white chocolate, macadamia nuts, and crushed candies.

Though American bakers have always been unusually open to new products, whether cream cheese or coconut, our baked goods have never lost the charming straightforwardness that has characterized them since the beginning. Old cookbooks abound with simple fruit desserts that show a frugal determination to use what was on hand. The same creative spirit motivated early cooks to stir stale bread crumbs into a mixture of stewed spiced apples for a brown Betty or top fruits with a simple mixture of flour, butter, sugar, and oats for a crisp, or with biscuit dough for a cobbler. And who but an American baker would think of baking a pineapple cake in a cast-iron skillet, then upending tradition by turning the whole thing upside down?

In selecting recipes from old cookbooks and pamphlets, I paid close attention to recipes that appeared repeatedly in many sources by different authors. That, I felt, was a good indication of a recipe's popularity and intrinsic worth. After several years of testing, I've chosen only the best for this book.

In re-creating recipes from the past, I looked upon them as a blueprint or guide, a suggestion of something that might be. Cookbook language, especially in older books, is often hard to follow, full of strange ingredients such as "grown flour" (flour that had been spoiled by dampness and could not be made into proper bread), or "barm" (a type of sourdough made by adding flour to fermenting beer or ale), and measurements like "gills," "wine glasses," and "tumblers." Often the recipes I encountered were simply a string of ingredients separated by commas, with no mixing details, pan sizes, oven temperatures, or baking times. Exceptional food writers such as Eliza Leslie and Maria Parloa wrote in paragraph form, as was the norm, but they gave specific ingredient amounts and provided detailed directions and visual clues to guide the cook. Only a handful of cookbook authors began a recipe with a list of ingredients followed by instructions for preparation. Sarah Tyson Rorer, in *Mrs. Rorer's Philadelphia Cook Book* of 1886, set the standard for

recipe writing that we still use today, with a list of ingredients followed by the method.

As I tested, I also had to remind myself that the sugar and butter, ovens, and cooking equipment we use today are entirely unlike those of the past. Sugar, for example, was not the pure white granulated kind we buy today but was likely to contain some molasses. It was solidified into cones and had to be cut with special snippers and crushed before using. Wheat flour was often “unbolted,” or whole grain. Only after the mid-nineteenth century did “cleaner” white flours become available because of newer milling and sifting techniques. I was amazed, however, to see how many spices home cooks used a hundred or more years ago. Allspice, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, mace, and nutmeg were regularly added in far greater quantities than they are today.

Because of these differences, making these old recipes exactly as written was all but impossible. I’ve tried to be true to their spirit while filling in the missing details. Whenever possible, I’ve relied on time- and labor-saving equipment, such as electric mixers and food processors. In addition, while many of the recipes in this book faithfully reproduce ones I encountered in old cookbooks, others are my own creations, loosely based on those of the past. Some were inspired by ingredients our ancestors lacked, such as dried blueberries and cranberries or white chocolate. I hope you’ll feel comfortable enough with these recipes to conduct your own ongoing experiments in the great American tradition of improvisation, throwing in a little something here or there to see what happens—just as Amelia Simmons and Ruth Wakefield would have done.

FROM FIREPLACE TO ELECTRIC RANGE

In eighteenth-century America, the fireplace was the center of life in the kitchen. Roasting was done on spits over wood coals, and vegetables, soups, and stews were cooked in cast-iron pots suspended on metal arms that could be swung above or away from the fire to give some control over temperatures. A single loaf of bread might be baked in a Dutch oven nestled into the hot coals of the fireplace, but most baking took place in wood-fired brick ovens.

To make the fire, the housewife had to load the logs into the oven and ignite them. Since the oven had no flue, she regulated the heat by keeping the door ajar to allow oxygen in. After about two hours, when the wood had been reduced to coals and ashes and the oven was hot enough to bake bread, she swept out the oven and put in her doughs. Small loaves could bake directly on the hearth surface. Larger loaves were baked in pans.

In most New England homes, the oven was built into the side of a large fireplace. The Pennsylvania Dutch cooked their food in kitchen fireplaces but did their baking in brick ovens in bakehouses that were completely separate from their homes. In the larger plantations of the South, the kitchens themselves were separate from the house, which made sense not only because of the hot climate but also from the standpoint of safety. Kitchens often caught on fire, and if they burned down, at least the large mansions would be spared.

Though they were extremely laborious, requiring a thorough mastery of heat regulation, something that was only attained after years of experience, brick ovens made superior breads with marvelous crusts and moist textures—and they are still the ovens of choice for professional bakers. They also retain heat for a long time, the temperature falling gradually over many hours. This allowed the housewife to bake a variety of breads, pies, cookies, and custards, in that order, each item going into the oven at the appropriate level of heat.

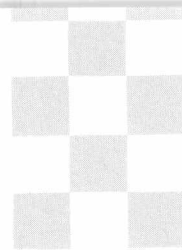
Brick ovens required huge amounts of wood. During the first two hundred years of settlement by colonists, forests were depleted to such a degree that another source of fuel had to be found. In the late 1700s, a new kind of oven was designed, the cast-iron range, which replaced both the brick oven and the fireplace as the primary choice for cooking. The range—popularly known as the iron monster—was enormous and unwieldy, but it economized on fuel. It could burn coal or wood, or later, oil or gas. Women had a devil of a time getting used to this huge interloper that came with flues, dampers, and all sorts of other controls. But the one feature it lacked was a thermostat.

More than half a century after the cast-iron range began finding its way into homes, housewives still needed instruction in its use. Cookbook author Sarah Tyson Rorer provided this advice in *Mrs. Rorer's Philadelphia Cook Book* (1886):

Study the draughts of your range. . . . Close the dampers, and this will throw the heat around the oven. Pull the dampers out only when you wish the heat or gas to escape into the chimney. . . . Open the draughts and dust damper, rake the fire well, until free from every particle of ashes; then open the top and brush the soot and the small pieces of coal, if any, from the top of the oven into the fire. See that the corners are free from ashes, and fill the fire-box even full with coal. . . . If you add more coal than this, you cut off the upper draught, and, of course, lose much heat. Now clean out the ashes, and carry them away.

The technological leap from the cast-iron range to modern gas and electric ovens with reliable thermostats occurred in the late 1920s, a mere thirty years or so from the time Mrs. Rorer wrote of struggling with the iron monster. By the mid-1930s, the new ranges had become standard kitchen appliances. When a woman wanted to bake, she simply turned a dial and set it to the desired temperature. She no longer needed to be a woodsman and engineer. Instead, she could devote her energies to the creative acts of cooking and baking.

ABOUT THE INGREDIENTS



When I was in my teens, I learned a valuable baking lesson from a lady named Edna Allen, who told me, “You have to put in good to take out good.” Using only the best ingredients is particularly important in baking, where inferior flours, fats, or flavorings will ruin something you’ve put your heart and soul into making.

Flours, Cornmeals, Grains, and Starches

FLOUR

About Flour In the United States, which grows some of the world’s best wheat, there are basically two separate species. They include more than one hundred distinct varieties that are cultivated today. Wheat is classified according to the season in which it’s sown. *Winter wheat* is planted in the fall and reaped in the late summer or autumn of the following year. *Spring wheat* is sown in the spring and harvested in the fall of the same year.

Both winter and spring wheats can be “hard” or “soft,” depending on their protein content. Generally speaking, the higher the amount of protein, the harder the wheat. The color of the wheat grain is another indicator of protein content. You may see bags of flour in the grocery store labeled “hard red spring wheat” or “hard red winter wheat,” which are ideal for making bread. Soft red winter wheat flour is best used in cakes and pastries. Other soft wheat flours include *winter* and *spring white wheat* flours. The important point to keep in mind is to choose the proper flour for what you are going to bake. If it’s a cake or pastry, you’ll want a soft wheat flour, low in protein (8 to 9 percent). If you’re baking a chewy, yeasty bread, then opt for a hard wheat flour (11 to 13 percent). Check the label on the flour package for protein content to determine if it’s milled from soft or hard wheat. For each $\frac{1}{4}$ cup flour, soft wheat cake flour will have 2 grams protein, all-purpose unbleached flour 3 grams, and hard wheat bread flour 4 grams.

I use *organic flours* in baking whenever possible. They are better for the planet and more healthful for us. These flours are becoming increasingly available in supermarkets. The all-purpose brand I use routinely is Gold Medal Organic Unbleached Flour. For most breads, I use a hard wheat organic bread flour made by either Giusto’s or King Arthur. Both can be ordered by mail if you can’t find a local source (see Sources, pages 525–26).