

100-year-old recipe a delicious reminder

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THE KITCHEN DIVA

March is National Women’s History Month, and we’d like to name some honorees of our own – wonderful women who’ve made significant and lasting contributions to the world of food in our country. When we think of people who influenced our cooking, we think of our mothers, grandmothers or aunts. It’s our families that give us our history, and food is very much a part of that. But when women stepped outside the home to become cooks and professional chefs, they made history for all women. They proved that in a world where few females had gone before, they not only achieved success, they changed the industry.

One of the most inspiring stories about the triumphant female chefs is the biography of Edna Lewis, the granddaughter of an emancipated slave. In 1949, she opened a successful and high-profile restaurant in Manhattan at a time when few women, especially black women, owned businesses. She cooked for luminaries such as William Faulkner, Truman Capote and Gloria Vanderbilt.

One of Edna’s favorites was a Lane Cake, also called an Amalgamation Cake. The cake was created after the Civil War. “Amalgamation” means “combining or uniting,” and the cake’s name may have symbolized the union of race and culture marked by the freeing of blacks from slavery. The history behind the Lane Cake and the Amalgamation Cake is varied, but somewhere their paths cross. Today, both cakes are white cakes with a filling of raisins, nuts and coconut. Some recipes also use bourbon, dark rum or brandy. This recipe was passed down from contributor Gina Harlow’s husband’s grandmother. She was given the recipe by her mother-in-law, which makes it more than 100 years old! No matter which name you choose for this historic recipe, it’s a delicious reminder of the contributions that women have made to the culinary industry.

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KITCHEN DIVA PHOTO

Amalgamation Cake was created after the Civil War. ‘Amalgamation’ means ‘combining or uniting,’ and the cake’s name may have symbolized the union of race and culture marked by the freeing of blacks from slavery. It is a white cake with a filling of raisins, nuts and coconut. Some recipes also use bourbon, dark rum or brandy.

AMALGAMATION CAKE

For the cake:

- 2 sticks (1 cup) unsalted butter, room temperature, plus more for the pans
- 3 cups all-purpose flour, more for the pans
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 1 cup whole milk, room temperature
- 5 egg whites, room temperature

For the fruit filling:

- 5 egg yolks, room temperature
- 1 1/2 cups granulated sugar
- 1 stick (1/2 cup) unsalted butter
- 1 cup raisins
- 1 cup sweetened grated coconut
- 1 cup chopped pecans

For the boiled white frosting:

- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 3/4 cup water
- 1 teaspoon cream of tartar
- 2 egg whites, room temperature

For the sugared pecans (optional):

- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1 egg white
- 1 tablespoon water
- 2 cups pecans
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar

For the cake:

- Heat oven to 350 F. Butter and flour two 9-by-2-inch cake pans. Set aside.
- Sift together 3 cups flour, baking powder and salt. Set aside.
- Place butter in bowl of electric mixer. Cream on medium-low speed and gradually add sugar. Continue mixing until pale yellow. Alternating between dry and wet ingredients, starting and ending with dry, add the flour mixture and milk to the butter mixture. Set aside. (The batter will be very stiff and thick.)
- In a clean second bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, beat the egg whites to stiff peaks, 3 to 5 minutes. Take a cup or so of beaten whites and whisk into batter. Fold in remaining beaten whites. Divide batter between prepared pans.
- Bake until the tops are pale golden and a toothpick inserted into the center comes clean, 35 to 40 minutes. Remove to rack to cool slightly. Invert the cake layers onto a rack to cool completely.

For the filling:

Combine yolks, sugar and butter in a medium, heavy saucepan over medium heat. Cook, stirring constantly, until the sugar is completely dissolved and the mixture is thick and candylike, about 10 minutes. Remove from heat and add raisins, coconut and pecans. Set aside and keep warm.

For the frosting:

- In a small, heavy saucepan, combine sugar, water and cream of tartar. Heat over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until sugar has dissolved. Increase heat to a boil. Do not stir anymore. Boil, washing down sides of pan with a pastry brush dipped in cold water from time to time to prevent sugar from crystallizing, until a candy thermometer registers 240 F, about 5 minutes.
- Meanwhile, in bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, whisk the egg whites on medium speed until soft peaks form, about 2 1/2 minutes.
- Remove syrup from heat when temperature reaches 240 F. Pour syrup in a steady stream down the side (to avoid splattering) of the bowl containing the egg white mixture, with the mixer on medium-low speed. Beat frosting on medium speed until cool, 5 to 10 minutes. The frosting should be thick and shiny.

To assemble the cake:

Place one of the cooled cake layers on a cardboard cake round. Spread with half the fruit filling. Top with the second layer, bottom side up, and top with remaining fruit filling. Ice the sides of the cake with the reserved boiled icing.

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