

Maker Mondays

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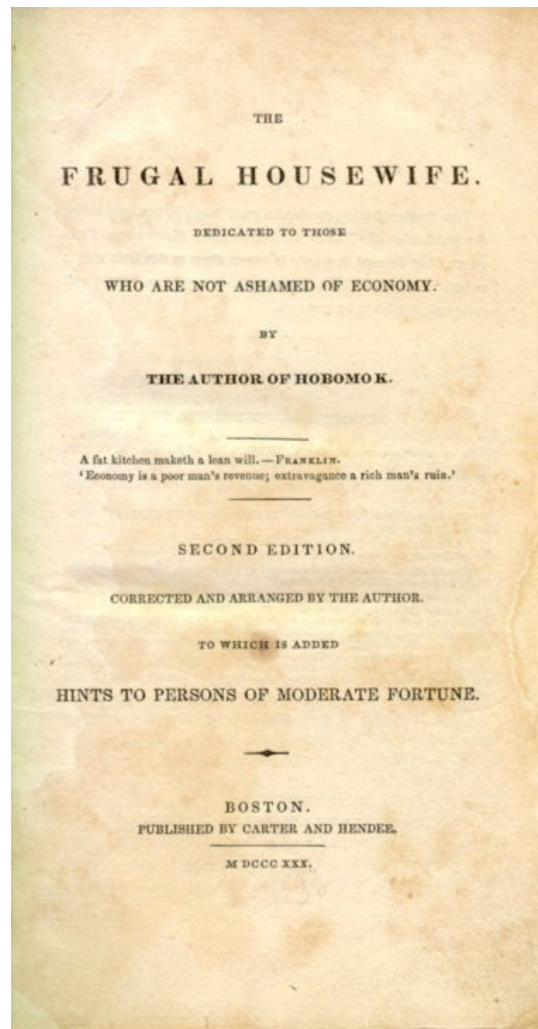
Welcome to Week Seven of Maker Mondays from Historic Deerfield. Check your social media feed or look for an email from us every Monday for a fun activity that you can do at home, inspired by history and using common household items.

Making a Cup Cake --- Baking with Lydia Maria Child

We have so appreciated your response to our Maker Mondays Blog and have enjoyed the emails and photos you have sent us. From your feedback, we know that our Butter and Biscuit blog was a favorite so we thought we would offer another baking project. This one is a cake recipe that comes from a book published in 1829.



The book is Lydia Maria Child's [The Frugal Housewife](#). While it is a cookbook with recipes for meat, vegetables, cakes and pies, it also included advice on cleaning, parenting, medical problems, and many tips for saving money. Throughout much of Lydia Maria Child's life she had to be frugal; she often wrote about having to spend money wisely and carefully without wasting food or time.



Before you begin making Lydia Maria Child's cake, here is a little bit about her very interesting life. She was born in 1802 in Medford, Massachusetts, and died in Wayland, Massachusetts in 1880. She was an author, journalist, editor and scholar who wrote novels, poems and children's stories. Lydia Maria Child lived her life filled with a strong sense of morality and was a prominent advocate for the abolition of slavery and for the rights of Native Americans. She believed deeply in women's suffrage--the right for women to vote--and used the "power of her pen" to advocate for justice for all. Mrs. Child lived in Northampton, Massachusetts for several years (1838-1841) after the publication of this book. If you would like to learn more about Lydia Maria Child we recommend the website of the David Ruggles Center for History and Education. This small museum, located in Florence, Massachusetts, is a rich source of information about Lydia Maria Child and other important abolitionists who lived and worked in the Connecticut River Valley in the mid-nineteenth century. Here is the website: www.davidrugglescenter.org.

Now, Let's Make Cup Cake!

Have you ever wondered about the history of cupcakes? Why are they called cupcakes? Were they cakes baked in cups? The answer is: yes! Child's cookbook was published in 1829, but the "Cup Cake" she promotes has a longer history with origins in British cookery. It is probably related to an eighteenth-century recipe for Queen's Cakes which called for a rich, sweet cake to be baked in small tins or even tea cups. These cakes used spices and currants. Child's recipe for Cup Cake is a nineteenth-century "frugal" modification of an older recipe.

At Historic Deerfield, we often use recipes from The Frugal Housewife in our Open Hearth Cooking Program. The book has a chapter called *Common Cakes*. At the very beginning of the chapter she writes "*In all cakes where butter and eggs are used, the butter should be very faithfully rubbed into the flour, and the eggs beat to a foam, before the ingredients are mixed.*" We have found that many receipts, or recipes, in old cookbooks do not provide all of the step-by-step instructions that we are used to seeing today. The recipe for Cup Cake is pretty spare, and Child does tell the baker how long to bake the cakes but not at what temperature. She would have been baking either in a brick bake oven or bake kettle. She may have had access to an iron cookstove--we do not know for sure. The assumption would be that the cook would know how hot to have her fire to make coals to place under and over her bake kettle, when to put them into the bake oven (the beehive oven), or how to use a wood-fired cookstove, and she would adjust the timing based on temperature. Here is the recipe from the cookbook:

Cup Cake

Cup cake is about as good as pound cake, and is cheaper. One cup of butter, two cups of sugar, three cups of flour, and four eggs, well beat together, and baked in pans or cups. Bake twenty minutes and no more.

This is a fun recipe to make with children because it has been called the 1-2-3-4 Cake: 1 cup of butter, 2 cups of sugar, 3 cups of flour, and 4 eggs.

When we set out to make this recipe at home, we made a slight modification to the instructions. You will see that in our step-by-step directions below. You can decide how you will interpret the recipe!

Step 1: Assemble Ingredients and Equipment.

Note: Your butter and eggs should be room temperature.



Step 2: Cut the butter up into small pieces and place in a mixing bowl.



Step 3: --this is a modification to the recipe: Cream the butter by hand with a wooden spoon.



Step 4: Add the sugar to the butter and mix thoroughly.



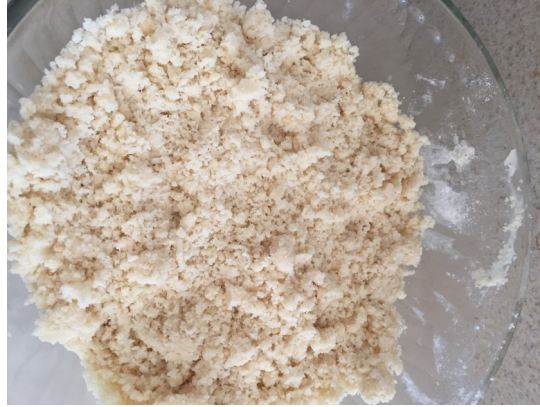
Step 5: Add the Flour to the Butter/Sugar mixture.



Step 6: Rub the butter into the flour with your hands:



Step 7: The mixture should now look like coarse crumbs.



Step 8: Crack the eggs into a separate bowl:



Step 9: Whisk the eggs by hand into a foam. This step takes about 2 minutes.



Step 10: Add the eggs to the butter, flour and sugar mixture. Stir the batter until the eggs are incorporated into the batter. NOTE: The batter will be very stiff and thick.



Step 11: Spoon the dough into a greased muffin pan or small cake tins or pans. We used a muffin pan (also called a cupcake pan).



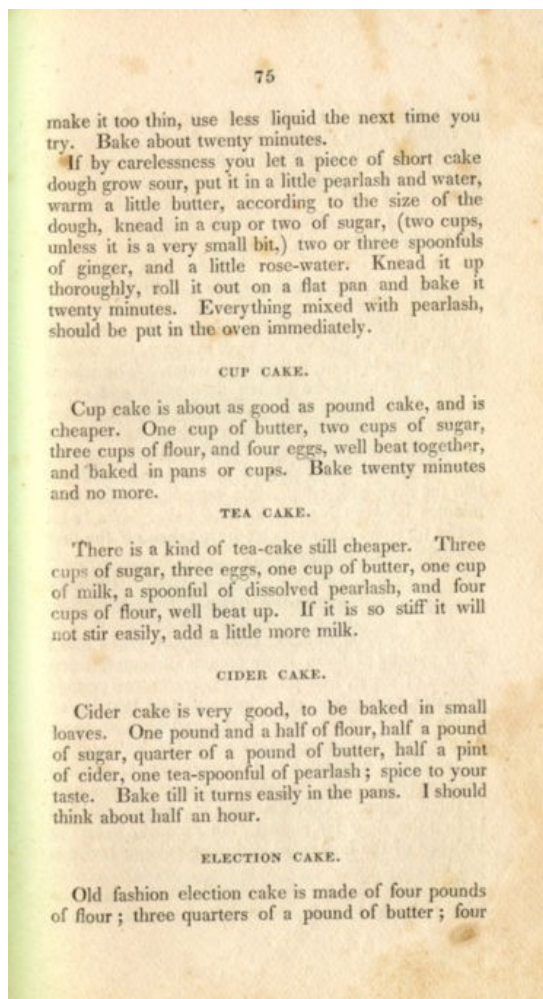
Step 12: Bake at 350 degrees for 20-25 minutes. We felt that our cup cakes were finished when their tops bounced back after a light touch and the edges were golden brown.



Remove them from the pan a few minutes after taking them out of the oven. You may have to use a butter knife to loosen them. Cool on a wire rack and then store in an airtight container. They are delicious hot and fresh out of the oven. They are dense, buttery, and sweet.

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Child also provides a recipe for Tea Cake in her book. This cake uses milk and a chemical leavening called pearlash. In 1829, chemical leavenings were just coming into home use--today we are very familiar with baking soda and baking powder.



And... while you are eating your sweet, buttery treats you might want to sing the favorite Thanksgiving song so many of us know: "*Over the river and through the wood to grandmother's house we go.*" Why do we suggest this? The answer: Lydia Maria Child wrote it as a poem in 1844, titling it "The New England Boy's Song about Thanksgiving Day."

We hope you enjoy trying Child's recipe for Cup Cake in your modern kitchen! Let us know about your Cup Cake. Take a picture of it and tell us who you shared yours.

Note: You can access the whole book at Michigan State University's website. They have scanned many historic cook-books and made them available in the public domain. <https://d.lib.msu.edu/fa>