



Homestead Notes



Historic recipes preserved by Ephrata farm wife

By SALLY BAIR
Farm Feature Writer

Handing down recipes from generation to generation is nothing new. Many treasured recipes have been saved in this way. A mother teaches her daughter, who in turn teaches her daughter, and a tradition is kept intact.

The case of Mrs. Robert D. Strauss's favorite sugar "cake" recipe is a little different however. She learned to make it from her great-uncle, Charles Rickert of Manheim, and so these cookies are particularly special.

But how did this uncle become a baker? The Rickert family resided in Litzitz during the middle 1800's, but when Charles Rickert's mother died and his father remarried, he left home. To support himself he went to work for a German baker in Litzitz, George Wilhelm. Apparently Rickert chose this profession mostly as a means of support, and not because he was especially interested in being a baker.

Nevertheless, he learned the trade well, and, interestingly, kept a small leather notebook with a few recipes for "cakes," which all kinds of cookies were then called.

When he married in 1894, Rickert moved to Manheim, Mrs. Strauss relates. It was then that he began his daily walk to Litzitz from Manheim, "following the railroad tracks," Mrs. Strauss said. Eventually, this became rather a burden and he went to work for his brother-in-law, Elam Showers, who was a baker in Manheim around 1910-1912.

Mrs. Strauss explained that her great uncle was "like a grandfather to me," since she lived in his home with her mother. "He never wanted to be called grandfather, just Uncle Charlie." She said she learned to bake from him, "because I was always around him." At the time she helped him with his baking, "he didn't work as a baker; he was a laborer."

Mrs. Strauss recalls that as a child, "I would stand beside the kitchen cabinet and watch him roll out the cookies, and at the end he'd let me work with some of the dough."

She said, "He never measured when he was baking." So when she married, she asked him if she could measure his work and keep a recipe for herself. And that's how she acquired the delicious sugar "cake" recipe which is given later.

She recalled that Rickert enjoyed baking "cakes and things" until he was in his seventies. "We used to take bicycle rides and take walks to White Oaks - we'd follow the railroad tracks." He died in 1958 when he was 88 years old. He and his wife had had just one son who died in infancy, so the named has died out Mrs. Strauss said.

She said Rickert would bake just for himself or for the church. If the church was having a function, he would bake "cakes" in quantities and donate them.

As a little girl, Mrs. Strauss said it would frequently be her job to get "bottled raw milk" from the store for her uncle to use in his baking. She also recalled that he had a bin in his kitchen cabinet which would store about 50 lbs. of flour. There was a sifter at the bottom, so the flour was sifted as it came out.

Mrs. Strauss still uses her uncle's cutting board, rolling

pin and the juice glass he used to cut out "cakes." She also uses the same china sup and spoon he used to mix sour milk and soda.

Sugar Cookies

1 lb. light brown sugar
¾ cup butter and lard
4 eggs
1 cup sour milk
1 tsp. soda
4½ cups flour (not level)
1 tsp. cream of tartar

Mrs. Strauss offered some tips on how to make successful cookies. When measuring the flour, the cup should not be leveled, and when all ingredients are mixed, the dough is very sticky. She said, "It looks like you couldn't roll it out."

For best results, she said chill before rolling, preferably overnight, and return the bowl to refrigerator between rolling out small batches of dough.

She also said, "Roll the dough very lightly, using a little flour to prevent it from sticking." Roll the dough about ¼ inch thick and cut it with a juice glass about 2-2½ inches in diameter, dipping the cutter in flour each time.

The cookies may be decorated with sugar before baking, or with icing and colored sugar, coconut or walnuts while still warm. Bake for 12 minutes in a 350 degree oven. The recipe makes about 4-5 dozen.

Mrs. Strauss said she always makes a double batch of the cookies, and stores them in a lard can. Her children, Robert, Jr., 20, Deborah, 18, Richard, 17, and Steve, 15 happily make short work of the cookies.

Fortunately, Mrs. Strauss worked out the measurements for this recipe in the language we use for cooking today. However, the recipes recorded in the notebook are in the jargon used in the late 1800's. In case you're brave enough to try some authentic older recipes, here are some copied directly from Rickert's notes:

If you're feeding a crowd, try this recipe, titles "600 Cakes"

12 quarts of Yeast
4½ qts. of Milk
8½ lbs. of Sugar
3½ lbs. of Butter
3½ lbs. of Lard
17 eggs
Cinnamon

For a smaller group, this might strike your fancy.
"350 Cakes"

7 qts. of Yeast
3 qts. of Milk
4½ lbs. of Sugar
2 lbs. of Butter
2 lbs. of Lard
10 eggs

This recipe for "Lemon Cakes" uses some unusual ingredients.

4 lbs. of Sugar
2½ lbs. of Butter
2 dozen eggs

Continued on Page 44



Decorating the finished product is really a labor of love. Here Mrs. Strauss adds icing, colored sugars or coconut or nuts. The end product is delicious.



Mrs. Strauss looks over Rickert's recipe notebook and his father's book of accounts.



Country Corner



Farmers are producing more - consumers eating less

By MELISSA PIPER

Farmers and their families work 10-14 hours per day to produce food and food commodities and while in 1975, a farm unit could produce enough for themselves and 50 other people, food consumption has hit a slump!

It hardly seems possible that in today's society where every imaginable food is offered for the consumer's delight, eating has decreased yet on the records it is very clear. In fact the food consumption rate for the people in the United States during the past year has never been lower since 1968.

Some of the largest declines in per capita consumption included sugar, fats and oils along with pork and lamb. The probable cause of these commodity declines being the increased prices. At

the beginning of 1975 we experienced the great "sugar panic" which sent many people toward artificial substitutes and with the decreased number of slaughter hogs the price of pork climbed upward quickly.

But while prices caused the per capita consumption to come down, it should be noted that the consumer price index for all food in 1975 only increased by 8½ percent compared to the two previous years when it rose to 14 percent.

When we ponder over these statistics it would seem that the increases in the total expenditure for food must indicate long grocery bill tapes but in reality it is the snacking and restaurant meals that has really upsurged the figures.

Eating out was responsible for over one-half the increase in the food price index during the last portion of 1975. Fast food chains, the local lunch

bar and the ice cream stand are getting more of our money each year while much of the groceries in our refrigerators and cupboards go to waste.

Our mobile society has certainly changed our way of living and eating! It would seem that today more than ever we are buying more food and yet eating less - confusing though it may seem.

Maybe the farmers should take a small vacation or become a little less productive and instead of feeding 50 people he could cut back to feeding 25. Well, although it seems tempting, today's farm family just won't give it a try because their labor combined with the most modern technology and chemical help will keep their production ever increasing. And whether the food goes to our home kitchens, grocery shelves or local hamburger stand, it has still been produced by the most efficient agricultural production unit - the farm family!