

Mrs. Ada Sorenson
2 cups corn
2 eggs, 2
1, 1/4 c
tablespoon
Florence Gray.
1 cup molasses, 1
1 1/2 teaspoons soda
two hours



Favorite Recipes: Relationships Past and Present in the Pages of a Regional Community Cookbook

By Rachel A. Snell

In the late 1920s, members of the Mount Desert Chapter No. 20 of the Order of the Eastern Star compiled a cookbook of favorite recipes.¹ Though their plan for the proceeds has been lost to time, the mission of the order suggests that the funds raised by the sale of the cookbook were likely donated to charitable causes. During the peak of associational life, from the late-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, the Order of the Eastern Star was one of a number of social organizations that shaped civic life and sociability on Mount Desert Island.² The recipes collected by the members of this chapter provide windows into the lives of early-twentieth-century women, both within and outside of domestic spaces.

A sense of local foodways (the cultural, social, and economic practices related to food) emerges from the pages of this collection of recipes. Homey recipes like "Brown Bread," "Yankee Bean Soup," "Halibut Loaf," and "Mustard Pickles," provided the foundation for simple family

suppers. Recipes for puddings, doughnuts, cookies, cakes, and pies that homemakers baked on Saturdays satisfied sweet teeth and served company throughout the coming week. Among the staples of nineteenth-century foodways that appear in *Favorite Recipes*, a new type of cooking is also apparent. The influence of national, commercial brands is unmistakable in the ingredient lists. Approximately 40 percent of the recipes contained within the book reference a commercialized name-brand product, such as Dunham's Coconut, Karo Syrup, Dot Chocolate, or Quaker Oats, or ingredients that were made available by technological advances and national transportation networks, including various canned products, tropical fruits, marshmallows, puffed rice, and peanut butter. Among the sweets in the cookbook are Needhams, a chocolate-covered coconut candy. These are an oft-cited example of Maine ingenuity—the recipe calls for three small potatoes—and yet, ironically, their inclusion in the recipe book is perhaps an indication of a growing reliance on mass-produced food; it is half a package of shredded coconut that provides them with their iconic taste.

NEEDHAMS—Mrs. Myra Richardson.

Three small potatoes, confectioner's sugar, 1/2 package shredded coconut, chocolate, vanilla. Boil potatoes, while hot mash and mix with all the confectioner's sugar they will take up. Add coconut and vanilla. Turn in pan lined with oiled paper. Pat in shape and pour melted chocolate over it. Let chocolate harden, then turn out and pour melted chocolate on the other side.

Myra Richardson's recipe for Needhams from Favorite Recipes. *Mount Desert Island Historical Society*

Aside from producing this useful record of methods of food preparation, the Order of the Eastern Star, like other women's organizations of the early twentieth century, strengthened the social bonds between rural Maine women. The opening selection of the recipe book, "Recipe for a Happy Life," was penned by Margaret Navarre, a significant figure in the French Renaissance, often referred to as "the first modern woman." "Pastimes of all sorts," Navarre advises, "should be gathered as much as the hand can hold: of pleasant memory and hope three good drachms."³ The recipes for salads and cakes, which would be appropriate for an informal ladies' luncheon or tea, suggest the significance of social gatherings to the members of the Mount Desert Chapter, and complement the histories we have of this chapter. Additionally, the text of the cookbook can be used as a map and as a spatial analysis of the collected recipes, which reveal the continued importance of familial ties and residential proximity in the lives of rural women of the early twentieth century.

Favorite Recipes is a regional example of an activity practiced by groups of American women nationwide, from the Civil War era to the present. Community cookbooks—collections of recipes

contributed by local women and published for sale—were perennial fundraisers for women's organizations. Compiled by groups of women, each recipe was attributed to a donor, and often appeared with a few lines from the donor describing the merits of the particular recipe. Originating during the Civil War, the first community cookbooks provided women on the home front with an additional means of supporting the troops, and a means of supporting veterans, widows, and orphans after the war. Up to the present, these cookbooks have supported a variety of causes, from church and reform organizations to social clubs, and even women's suffrage. Community cookbooks were a particularly popular form of fundraising for women's groups in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, with more than three thousand published between 1864 and 1922.⁴

As records of women's social organizations, details in community cookbooks can help us to reconstruct



Recipe for a Happy Life

Three ounces are necessary, first of patience,
Then of repose and peace; of conscience
A pound entire is needful:
Of pastimes of all sorts, too,
Should be gathered as much as the hand can hold:
Of pleasant memory and of hope three good drachms
There must be at least. But they should moistened be
With a liquor made from true pleasures which rejoice the
heart.
Then of love's magic drops a few—
But use them sparingly, for they may bring a flame
Which nought but tears can drown.
Grind the whole and mix therewith of merriment an ounce
To even. Yet all this may not bring happiness
Except in your orisons you lift your voice
To Him who holds the gift of health.

—Written by Margaret of Navarre in 1500.



FAVORITE RECIPES

BREAD, BISCUIT, MUFFINS, ETC.

BRAN BREAD—Mrs. Jennie Somes.

One and one-half cups Pillsbury's Health Bran, $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups Kellogg's All Bran, 4 level teaspoons salt, 2 tablespoons shortening. Pour over this 2 cups boiling water and let cool, then add 5 mixing spoons molasses, 6 cups white flour, $1\frac{1}{4}$ yeast cakes dissolved in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup warm milk, 1 cup raisins. Warm water enough to make a soft dough. Let rise and bake one hour.

PARKER HOUSE ROLLS—Mrs. Thalia B. Nutting

One cake Fleischmann's yeast, 1 pint milk, 2 tablespoons sugar, 4 tablespoons butter or lard, 3 pints sifted flour, 1 teaspoon salt. Dissolve yeast and sugar in lukewarm milk; add lard or butter and $1\frac{1}{2}$ pints flour. Beat until smooth; cover and let rise in a warm place for one hour until light. Then add remainder of flour, or enough to make a dough, and lastly salt. Knead well, place in oiled bowl, cover and let rise for about $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours until double its bulk. Roll out $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick, brush with butter; cut with a biscuit cutter, crease through the middle and fold over in pocket-book shape. Place in well greased pan, cover, and let rise until light. Bake in hot oven 10 minutes.

CORN CAKE—Mrs. Ada Somes.

Two cups flour, 4 tablespoons corn meal, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar, $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups sweet milk, 2 eggs, 2 tablespoons shortening. Beat well.

BROWN BREAD—Mrs. Florence Gray.

Three cups soaked bread crumbs, 1 cup molasses, 1 cup sour milk, 2 cups corn meal, $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons soda, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt. Steam at least two hours.

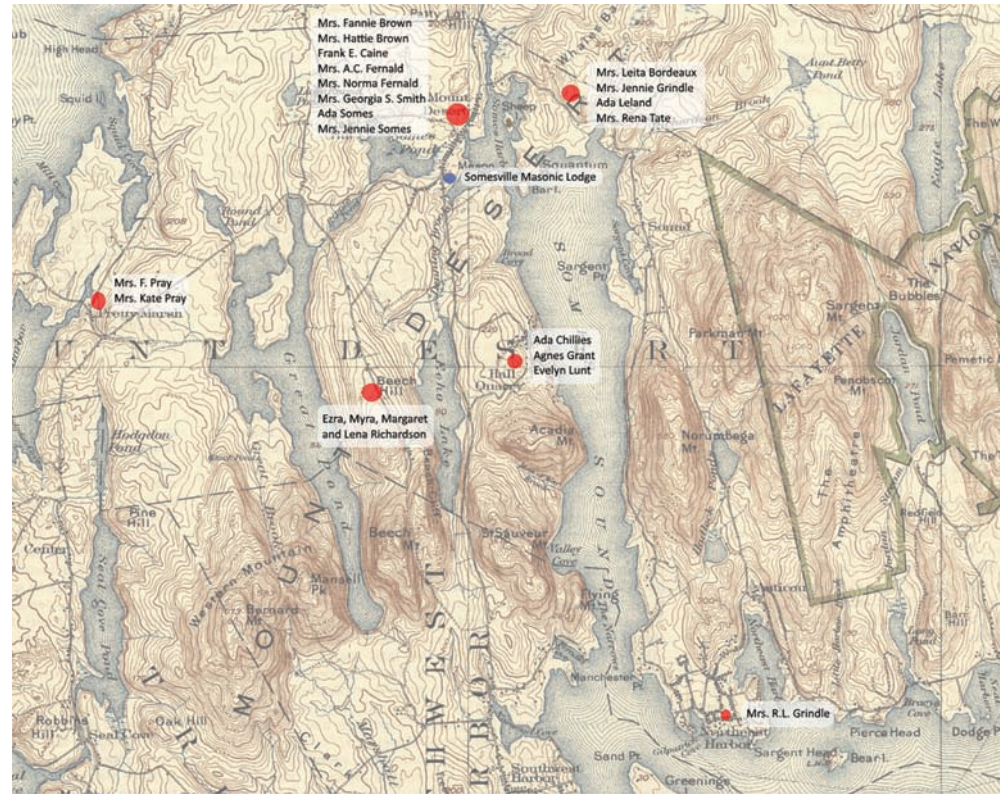
women's social networks. In *Eat My Words: Reading Women's Lives through the Cookbooks they Wrote*, Janet Theopano argued, "women's cookbooks can be maps of the social and cultural worlds they inhabit."⁵ In this way, *Favorite Recipes* reveals a constellation of relationships. The first layer of relationships is formed on the basis of membership in the Order of the Eastern Star. A co-ed organization, the order is open to "Master Masons in good standing in a Masonic Lodge, and their wives, daughters, mothers, widows, and sisters, who have attained the age of eighteen years."⁶ The required family connection is apparent in the text through many family groupings, including the four members of the Ezra Richardson family—mother, father, and daughters—each of whom contributed recipes. Business relationships are likewise preserved within the text. There is Mrs. Jennie Somes, proprietress of the Somes House Inn, who possibly prevailed upon the Inn's chef, Mr. Frank E. Caine, to supply a recipe for "Yankee Bean Soup." Many of the advertisements in the back of the cookbook, which were gathered by the members to support the expense of printing the cookbook, likewise indicate family relationships with local businesses, and businesses operated by chapter members themselves.

Cookbook collections such as *Favorite Recipes* shift our focus from considering women's experiences in time to considering their experiences across physical space. Research into historical and genealogical records permit this cookbook to be mapped, allowing women's networks to be presented visually, and thereby provide an image of social culture on Mount Desert Island during the period in which these recipes were collected. Of the forty-one women and two men who submitted recipes to the cookbook, thirty-three individuals can be definitively identified and mapped through Census Records and local directories. The map reveals that the majority of the recipe compilers, and likely the majority of the

members of the Mount Desert Chapter, resided in Somesville. A few lived further afield in Pretty Marsh, Sound, and Northeast Harbor, but the majority appear to have resided within easy commuting distance to the Masonic Lodge.

The clustering of recipe contributors in Somesville affirms the intentions of the founders of the Mount Desert Chapter. According to an undated "Brief History" of the chapter from 1894–1920, "the ladies of Somesville, desirous of enjoying more frequent opportunities of meeting together, held a number of meetings during the fall and winter of 1894, taking preliminary action toward the organization of a chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star."⁷ Mrs. Seth S. Thornton's account of community life in Southwest Harbor and Somesville suggests that the founding of Chapter No. 20, the first Masonic organization on the island that was open to women, was part of an island-wide increase in women's organizations during the last decade of the nineteenth century, which included, notably, the establishment of a chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, as well as other clubs.⁸ The fact that Eastern Star chapters were founded in the region in rapid succession (the Southwest Harbor chapter was founded in 1897) indicates that women's clubs followed a pattern similar to that established by men's fraternal organizations several decades earlier. The Masons provide an instructive example of the dispersal of fraternal life on Mount Desert Island during the second half of the nineteenth century. The island's Masons found travel to the original Masonic lodge—which

This map, created using census and directory data, provides a spatial analysis of the compilers of *Favorite Recipes*. Sources: *Federal Census of 1930 and Bar Harbor, Maine, City Directory (1931)* via *Ancestry.com*. Underlying 1928 Map of Lafayette National Park, Maine, courtesy of Southwest Harbor Public Library



was established at Southwest Harbor in 1856—too inconvenient, and petitioned for the establishment of several village-based lodges, including the Somesville chapter that would later host the women of the Order of the Eastern Star.

If attending meetings in Tremont presented a hardship for farmers and fishermen in the mid-nineteenth century, such excursions would have been virtually impossible for their wives. It is not surprising, then, that the proliferation of women's organizations on Mount Desert Island began in the 1890s, after the men's organizations on the island had

established an infrastructure for regular meetings. The creation of the Mount Desert Chapter provided the women of Somesville and surrounding villages with an opportunity to meet regularly at the Masonic Lodge and to attend to chapter business, as well as a chance to socialize outside of domestic spaces and obligations. The building of a new Masonic meetinghouse in Somesville in the early 1890s was likely the impetus for the creation of the Mount Desert Chapter. An account of the chapter's founding discusses many social events held at the new hall, "but the ladies were not quite satisfied," the account notes, "they wished to have a secret organization."⁹ The importance of the social aspect of membership to those in the Mount Desert Chapter cannot be



This undated photograph shows the two-and-a-half story Somesville Masonic Hall built in the early 1890s. *Mount Desert Island Historical Society*

overstated; the brief history notes twice that it was a desire for more opportunities for socialization that led to the establishment of the island's first chapter.

The recipes themselves also suggest the importance of this social function. While there is no lack of substantial family fare, recipes for cakes, cookies, salads, and other delicacies that may have formed the menu for a ladies' luncheon or an afternoon tea are well represented in *Favorite Recipes*. It is quite possible that these recipes provided the foundation for the menus of suppers served at officer appointments and at regular chapter meetings. Newspaper accounts of the Mount Desert Chapter's activities frequently note the quality of the spread, such as the comment that "delicious refreshments were served at the close of the chapter" meeting in January of 1932.¹⁰ In this sense, it is a recipe book perfectly suited to the women of the chapter and their increasingly organized network of friends,

family, and neighbors. Recipes suitable for quick, hearty, and wholesome family meals and for impressing guests, or fellow attendees of a neighborhood potluck, comingle within the cookbook.

Since the compilation of *Favorite Recipes*, socialization patterns have changed dramatically in rural Maine. In the mid-1970s, the Mount Desert Chapter of the Eastern Star celebrated five dedicated fifty-year members, including Mrs. Jennie Grindle, one of the cookbook's compilers, who also submitted recipes for "Graham Gems," "Golden Rod Toast," "Chocolate Cake (For Two)", and "Pop Corn Balls." By this time, the once-flourishing fraternal scene on Mount Desert Island had largely faded away. The previously independent Mount Desert Island-based chapters of

the Eastern Star would soon merge with Chapter No. 97 in Ellsworth. Other island organizations would follow suit as the availability of automobile travel and the consolidation of socialization patterns attributed to the general decline in participation in fraternal and religious organizations throughout American society, particularly in rural areas. The Mount Desert Chapter's cookbook remains as a tangible reminder of the significance of the Order of the Eastern Star in the social life of Mount Desert Island and of the relationships between its members.

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1. According to an undated history of the Mount Desert Chapter of O.E.S., "a committee consisting of Sisters Helen Fernald, Ada Leland and Lillian Simes" was created in 1930 to "solicit recipes and to compile and publish a cookbook." Their efforts produced the edition of *Favorite Recipes* analyzed in this article. This was the chapter's second attempt at a cookbook. An earlier collection of recipes, also titled *Favorite Recipes*, appeared in 1903. Both editions and a 1980s reprint of the 1903 cookbook are available in the collections of the Mount Desert Island Historical Society. *A Brief History of Mount Desert Chapter #20, O.E.S., 1894-1920*, 1, Mount Desert Island Historical Society, Mount Desert, ME.

2. William J. Skocpol, "Fraternal Organization on Mount Desert Island," *Chebacco* 9 (2008), 36-59.
3. Members of Mount Desert Island Chapter 20 Order of the Eastern Star, *Favorite Recipes* (Ellsworth: The American Print, c. 1930), 3. A drachms is a unit of weight formerly used by apothecaries, equivalent to sixty grains or one eighth of an ounce.
4. Anne Bower, "Cooking Up Stories: Narrative Elements in Community Cookbooks" in Anne Bower, ed., *Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 29-50; Janice Bluestein Longone, "'Tried Receipts': An Overview of America's Charitable Cookbooks," in Bower, ed., *Recipes for Reading*, 17-28; Margaret Cook, *America's Charitable Cooks: A Bibliography of Fund-raising Cook Books Published in the United States (1861-1915)* (Kent: Cookery Bibliography, 1971); Bob and Eleanor Brown, *Culinary Americana: Cookbooks Published in the Cities and Towns of the United States of America During the Years from 1860 through 1960* (New York: Roving Eye Press, 1961); Janet Theopano, *Eat My Words: Reading Women's Lives through the Cookbooks they Wrote* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 253-5.
5. Theopano, *Eat My Words*, 13.
6. Order of the Eastern Star General Grand Chapter, *Ritual of the Order Eastern Star* (Chicago, 1921), 1.
7. *A Brief History of Mount Desert Chapter #20, O.E.S., 1894-1920*, 1, Mount Desert Island Historical Society.
8. Mrs. Seth S. Thornton, *Traditions and Records of Southwest Harbor and Somesville, Mount Desert Island, Maine* (Bar Harbor, ME: Acadia Publishing Co., 1938. 1988 reprint.), 121, 254; Skocpol, "Fraternal Organization on Mount Desert Island," 40.
9. Somesville Clubs Collection, Mount Desert Island Historical Society.
10. "Somesville," *Bar Harbor Record* (Jan. 27, 1932): 7.