

# village view

by Andrea Leonard

It was perhaps sixty years ago that Osterville's first Girl Scout Troop was organized. To raise money for the troop and help the Girl Scouts purchase uniforms and buy the few available accessories, the girls collected recipes and sold advertisements for a Girl Scout Cook Book to be issued for the benefit of the Red Rose Troop.

This little cookbook was published with the help of several families who then summered at Wianno; the major advertising was for Knox Gelatine, Baker's Chocolate and Royal Baking Powder, while many local businessmen took small ads to help out the scouts.

Collected from village housewives renowned for fine cooking, the recipes range from soups to salads, from luncheon dishes to breads and muffins, from cookies and cakes to pickles and preserves.

There are frostings, fillings, and sauces; there are gingerbreads, puddings and pies. There are pastries and candies and a final section on Scout Recipes suitable for cooking outdoors.

The secret of how Osterville families survived the Great Depression may well lie in this little cookbook, for here are lessons combining New England frugality with New England good cookery, and proof they're mutually compatible is, quite literally, in the eating.

The cover of my own copy of the Girl Scout Cook Book is dog-eared, torn and mended. Its title, however, and the words "Issued for the Benefit of the Red Rose Troop" are still plainly legible, as are the recipes within.

Inside, in addition to recipes, are handwritten remarks penned by the book's original owner, my great aunt. "May good digestion wait on appetite, and health on both," she inscribed on the first page. Perhaps her spelling wasn't perfect, but since she lived over 97 years, her digestion must have been excellent.

A study of the recipes gives some clues about how food was (and still can be) stretched; a favorite method was scalloping. Suppose, for instance, you had a head of cabbage you knew wouldn't be quite enough to feed your family if you served it as plain boiled cabbage. Escalloped, it would do admirably.

Mrs. Rose Crocker's recipe reads, "One medium-sized cabbage cut fine and cooked in plenty of boiling water till tender (about 1/2 hour). While it is cooking make one cup of medium white sauce. Three tablespoons of melted butter, the same of flour stirred in and 1-1/2 cups of milk added. Season with salt and pepper and cook over hot water till thick. Drain cabbage thoroughly, add sauce, pour into shallow baking dish, cover with buttered crumbs and bake till bubbling hot."

Directions for making meat loaf give us an idea of how much easier cooking is now than it was sixty years ago. "Remove skin, gristle and bone from two pounds of beef (lower part of the round) and chop the meat fine." That's how one of the meatloaf recipes begins. That's what you had to do before you could pick up a pound of hamburger at the supermarket.

"Measure the meat and allow an equal quantity of bread crumbs, mix the two and add seasoning to taste. Moisten the mixture with soup stock, milk or water. Add one beaten egg for each pint of the mixture.

"Pack it into a buttered brick-loaf pan, place the pan in a pan of hot water, put it into the oven, and cook it until the loaf is firm in the center. Turn it out on a hot platter and serve with tomato sauce or white sauce."

As we read the old recipes, we must keep in mind that every kitchen was equipped with a wood- or oil- or coal-burning stove; in winter the stove helped to heat the house; in summer -- the stove helped to heat the house too.

To cook, the stove must be lit; the heat was welcome in January and February, but in July and August it was a curse. The alternative was cold or raw food; no husband or father would put up with any such nonsense as that.

In those days most families raised a pig each summer, slaughtered it late in the fall, and cured the meat for winter. This provided lard for pastries as well as bacon, ham, pork roasts and chops, and pickled pigs feet. Butter and chicken fat were often stretched by mixing them with lard. Some things, like piecrust, tasted just fine made entirely with lard.

Jennie Boulton's molasses cookies always tasted just fine to me, too; she was my grandmother. Her recipe called for 1 cup of molasses,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup boiling water with 1 teaspoon soda dissolved in it,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of lard, a pinch of salt, one of ginger, and "enough flour to roll."

Newton Puffs were a dainty Mrs. Ellen Tallman used to serve with a glass of milk. Although she was blind, she did all her own housework and cooking. She mixed one egg with  $\frac{2}{3}$  cup of sugar and  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup molasses. Into  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of milk she stirred a level teaspoon of soda and added it, with a half cup of shortening and a half-cup of raisins to the first mixture. A generous half-teaspoon each of nutmeg, cinnamon and clove provided flavor. "Flour enough so a spoon will stand up straight," completes the rule.

I'm not positive how long these were baked, but if I were to try them, I'd drop them off a teaspoon onto a greased cookie sheet and watch them carefully in a 375 oven "til done."

I asked Mrs. Tallman, once day, how she could bake when she couldn't see; she explained that she had a place for everything and always put everything in its place, and since no one bothered anything in her kitchen, whatever she needed was always exactly where she'd left it.

When we were children my mother made Hot Milk Cake at least once a week. It made a small loaf, light and not too rich; usually the seven of us finished it off at one meal, but since it didn't keep well and tended to dry out quickly, that was all to the good.

"Beat two eggs well, stir in a cup of sugar; add a cup of flour sifted twice with a teaspoon baking powder. Melt a teaspoon of butter in  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup scalded milk. Stir the milk into the batter. Flavor with  $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon of lemon or vanilla extract. Pour batter into a well-greased loaf pan and bake 35 minutes at 325 degrees."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK