



# American Cake: From Colonial Gingerbread to Classic Layer, the Stories and Recipes Behind More Than 125 of Our Best-Loved Cakes

*Anne Byrn*

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## American Cake: From Colonial Gingerbread to Classic Layer, the Stories and Recipes Behind More Than 125 of Our Best-Loved Cakes Anne Byrn

Cakes have become an icon of American culture and a window to understanding ourselves. Be they vanilla, lemon, ginger, chocolate, cinnamon, boozy, Bundt, layered, marbled, even checkerboard--they are etched in our psyche. Cakes relate to our lives, heritage, and hometowns. And as we look at the evolution of cakes in America, we see the evolution of our history: cakes changed with waves of immigrants landing on our shores, with the availability (and scarcity) of ingredients, with cultural trends and with political developments. In her new book *American Cake*, Anne Byrn (creator of the *New York Times* bestselling series The Cake Mix Doctor) will explore this delicious evolution and teach us cake-making techniques from across the centuries, all modernized for today's home cooks.

Anne wonders (and answers for us) why devil's food cake is not red in color, how the Southern delicacy known as Japanese Fruit Cake could be so-named when there appears to be nothing Japanese about the recipe, and how Depression-era cooks managed to bake cakes without eggs, milk, and butter. Who invented the flourless chocolate cake, the St. Louis gooey butter cake, the Tunnel of Fudge cake? Were these now-legendary recipes mishaps thanks to a lapse of memory, frugality, or being too lazy to run to the store for more flour?

Join Anne for this delicious coast-to-coast journey and savor our nation's history of cake baking. From the dark, moist gingerbread and blueberry cakes of New England and the elegant English-style pound cake of Virginia to the hard-scrabble apple stack cake home to Appalachia and the slow-drawl, Deep South Lady Baltimore Cake, you will learn the stories behind your favorite cakes and how to bake them.

## American Cake: From Colonial Gingerbread to Classic Layer, the Stories and Recipes Behind More Than 125 of Our Best-Loved Cakes Details

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**Stories and Recipes Behind More Than 125 of Our Best-Loved Cakes Anne Byrn**

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## **From Reader Review American Cake: From Colonial Gingerbread to Classic Layer, the Stories and Recipes Behind More Than 125 of Our Best-Loved Cakes for online ebook**

### **Melissa says**

Why didn't I think of becoming a food historian...

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### **Melissa Corbin says**

I've taken it upon myself to bake my way through history this summer. So, American Cake has been a treat. The recipes in this book vary in level of skill, but I can attest that they are all accessible if you follow them without exception. Regardless of the recipe, how can you not fall in love with the historical stories that accompany? If necessity is the mother of invention, you're going to love the story behind Byrn's Angel Food Cake. Is it sheath or sheet? Who cares...that Texas Sheet Cake is so easy AND delicious. I was lucky enough to get my hands on a galley copy of this fascinating story- Amerian Cake. A galley, of course, is not the finished product. So, I cannot wait to see these works of beauty in full-color on September 6th.

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### **Meredith says**

More than a cookbook, American Cake delves into the history of cakes in America's dessert culture, from New England gingerbread to California's orange and olive oil cake (which I'm curious to try). This was so much more than what I expected, having read several of Byrn's cookbooks. All in all, a lovely take on cake. :)

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### **Mich Must Read says**

This is a fun book. If you love history and you have any interest in cake you should read this. Byrn goes through the American history of baking taking one cake at a time going chronologically as they appear in history. This includes all the ingredients and measurements used or available at the time. We take for granted what we have access to, but most of the recipes here are written out of necessity and what was available at the time. Byrn goes through sweeteners, add ins, such as coconut, and nuts and where they would have been used in the U.S.. This includes baking that was in times of war rationing or economic upheavals. Baking was obviously influenced by technology, so ovens, beaters, and refrigerators are touched on in how they effected certain cakes.

I borrowed this from the library on Kindle, but I liked it so much I purchased a copy for a mother's day gift and plan on getting one for myself. Very good.

I baked a recipe out of this book. For more see my blog [michmustread.com](http://michmustread.com)

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### **Gail says**

I read about this on Smart Bitches, Trashy Books. This is a delightful, readable history of the cake in the United States. Included are tidbits about the rise (pun intended) of chemical leavings, history of cooking tools, and the history of cakes. Charming, mouthwatering, and interesting. So many cakes, so little time!

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### **QNPoohBear says**

Part history book and part cookbook, this book was tailor made just for me. I love history and experimenting with historical baking. I eagerly read the notes on the history of certain American cakes and how they evolved from European confections to American comfort foods and back and forth. Sometimes I questioned the author's research, certain that a type of cake existed earlier but she did more research than I could hope to do right now so I suppose the information is correct. I was especially interested in learning about German cakes. My maternal grandfather was German/Pennsylvania Dutch and my mom grew up in eastern Pennsylvania in the Moravian church. I was very excited to see the actual recipe for Moravian Sugar Cake, something I remember fondly from childhood Christmases. I was also intrigued by the origins of Shoo-Fly Pie, one of my favorite breakfast treats my grandmother used to make for me. Ours is a wet bottom pie but my mom has also made a Shoo-Fly cake.

Each section of the book is divided into decades. When the book enters the 20th century the cakes interested me less, with the exception of chocolate cake, of course. I NEED to make the Wellesley Fudge Cake! Where has this cake been all my life? The Chocolate Loaf Cake looks good too. 90% of the cakes don't appeal to me that much.

This is an amazing book for any historical baking lover.

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### **Alaine says**

I first learned of this book from a history podcast so I thought it was going to be much better than it was. I think this is probably a good book for cake recipes. I think. I haven't tried any recipes from it, but they seem right on the surface. I recommend going in for the recipes and ignoring the history.

It's called American Cake but it really should be called Middle Class, Whitewashed American Cake. I didn't keep notes as I read but there are basically a couple patronizing mentions of the contributions of African-American cooks to Southern cakes. I don't think you can speak of the importance of enslaved people's work in this day and age without some sort of qualifier, and there was none. There's mention of a cake supposedly crossing racial lines because white people and black people both baked it. Oh my God. As opposed to food in general?

There are mentions throughout of a time when women worked inside the home and a time when women worked outside the home. Poor white women and women of color have always worked outside the home. It was middle class white women who suddenly flocked to factories during WWII; brown women were already working.

She says things like (and this is not a direct quote) "Hispanics gave us tres leches cake". Emphasis on "us". As if she's only intended her book to be aimed at a specific audience, which doesn't include Latinos.

Anne Byrn is a food writer. She is not a historian. She is not a sociologist. I would have appreciated this book a lot more if she'd kept it to a collection of recipes without the commentary. Even then, she mentioned this masterpiece of a checkerboard cake several times and there's no picture! There are full color photos throughout the book so why am I having to Google to see a picture of this "showstopper"? If you're going to sell it that hard, throw in a picture. Come on.

Three stars because I do want to buy a copy for the recipes (I read a library ebook), but zero stars for the writing! And I'm disappointed in Stuff You Missed in History Class for promoting this book!

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### **Jeanette says**

Okay, this is basically a recipe book and I didn't read the recipes, but I enjoyed the historical notes about the cakes. It makes you think about things you otherwise wouldn't, like, who thought of putting ashes in cake batter to make it rise? How did people bake before oven thermometers? Interesting stuff.

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### **Amy says**

A fun read for a cook and history lover.

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### **Cathi says**

I heard great things about this book, so I decided to buy it for our daughter who is a fabulous baker and who LOVES cake. When it arrived, I browsed through it and found it so fascinating that I decided I needed to read it first before giving it away. This is a fantastic book! First of all, the photographs are gorgeous, and every cake is displayed in such an artistic, appealing way. Do not read this book on an empty stomach! You'll wish that you could try every cake.

Anyway, I'm not much of a baker. (I'd rather enjoy the masterpieces that others create and share.) So I have no intention of trying any of these recipes. I just loved the book for its history. I learned so much about baking and about all sorts of fascinating pieces of American life, from early colonial days to the present. I learned about world-famous chefs as well as ordinary housewives who entered the Pillsbury bake-off contests decades ago. You name it, this book's got it, and it's all laid out in a lovely, engaging way, both visually and with the written word. Our daughter (who has been gone for eighteen months and will be home in three days) is going to love it!

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### **Kristi Thielen says**

Want to learn American history in a new and interesting way? Read Anne Byrn's delicious book and be educated.

From election cakes, to the arrival of flaked coconut; from the railroads that sped ingredients to places all around the country to the Depression that forced cooks to make cakes as inexpensively as possible; from the elegant French cakes of the 1960s to the "culinary melting pot" cakes of today- it's all here. And by that I mean not just cakes, but a novel look at how our country has grown and changed.

And did I mention the recipes? Which, in fact, were once called "receipts"? They're so inspirational they could convert even a long-standing pie person.

Some of these "receipts" go back to the colonial era when cooks didn't provide standard measurements and ingredients. No matter. The author has made every effort to maintain authenticity while providing a recipe that a modern cake-baker can manage. And full-color, full-page photos give the book real eye-appeal.

Don't just sit there reading this - get this book and start baking. And if you opt to bake the Mary Ball Washington Gingerbread, the Pink Champagne Cake, or the Italian Cream Cake, please bring me a slice!

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### **Anne says**

Read it. Or, more accurately, I read all the non-recipe portions and skimmed the recipes. I cannot say how it works as a cookbook, but I enjoyed learning the history of the various cakes and some of the pans and kitchen appliances as well. I was surprised by the large number of cakes containing lots of spices and lemon. So many cakes that I would just think of as spice cakes in the early days of the nation.

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### **Elaine says**

I picked this book up the library only because there was a cake on the cover and I'm always on the lookout for **dessert porn!**

Imagine my surprise that the beautiful pics came with a side of historical anecdotes, including Presidential trivia, how cookbooks evolved and brief explanations on some famous names associated with baking like **Tupperware** and **Fannie Farmer**. If there's one thing I enjoy almost as much (but not as much as sweets), its American history.

My only beef is too much fruitcake and not enough *chocolatteeeee!!!*

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### **Lillian Lake says**

I loved this book and recommend it for anyone who not only loves to bake and create, but is interested in the history behind a recipe. In this case we are exploring cakes, including filling and frosting recipes. For instance, ever wonder why the Boston Cream Pie is called a "pie" and not a "cake"? Because in our more frugal days homemakers had one pan and it was used for pies AND cakes. Simple as that. Or how about the apple stack cake which is of southern heritage. In my grandmother's day, it was used for a wedding cake. It's delicious. And then there are names like "Lady Baltimore" and "Lazy Daisy".

Besides history of a particular cake, itself, Anne Byrn does a great job of discussing the use of cooking tools used in cake baking, as well as old and new terminology. A nice collection of photographs accompanies each recipe. There are some basic recipes, as well as some which are more challenging. Or at the least, time consuming.

I think this would be a delightful addition to any baker of desserts collection.

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### **Janet Whalen says**

More than a cookbook, an interesting culinary history. I didn't know baking powder was such a recent invention!

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### **Dana says**

The introduction to this book was extremely cringe-worthy and ignorant, so you could say it was also very American. I would really love a book very much like this with the interesting histories of recipes and beautiful pictures, but a much more progressive grasp of American history and culture. I know the 4 stars looks bad paired with this review -- but damn, the photos were beautiful, and I feel like I learned a lot about the history of the chemistry of cake.

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### **jeanmarie says**

I really enjoyed this book but it's in a tough place (as evidenced by the split in the reviews--people who either wanted to read about cakes or people who wanted to make cakes .... seems like there's not that big of an intersection of people who got this book to read about and make cakes). It's fun to own, but honestly, I'd use it more as a reference to google for actually good cake recipes rather than anything else.

The write-ups were interesting and a lot of it was new information to me (really enjoyed making the 'wacky cake'!). I felt like the historical component was engaging and well done. The cake side felt less well-done in that I feel like many of the cakes were included more for historical, rather than taste, reasons. The cakes I've made so far have been uneven in quality/deliciousness (wacky, shoofly pie, and am blanking on the third as it turned out so 'meh').

I think this was hard because tastes (and availability of ingredients) have changed so much over time. I think it might have been more successful if she'd focused on 'themes' of cake making (e.g. fruitcakes) and talked about the evolution of the recipes over time and then given a historical recipe and then a 'modern' recipe. I think feeling like she had to give recipes for each of the cakes mentioned meant it was more of fidelity to the original than a question of what would appeal to people. Although, maybe I'm in the minority here and/or I just picked bad cakes!

In short, it's a fun addition to the reference shelf and definitely a worthwhile library checkout.

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### **Mary says**

I thought this book was very interesting (and so appealing visually). There are so many recipes I want to try in this book, and most seemed reasonably easy to make. There are definitely cakes that take a lot more skill than others, but with the full-page photos for a lot of the cakes, the trouble all seems worthwhile! Plus, being a history major once upon a time, I loved the historical notes that accompanies each recipe. A history of the US through the cakes baked and shared, and told in small enough bits to keep interest and to really understand why certain ingredients would have been used over others at a certain time or in a certain region of the country. I am definitely bookmarking several recipes to try in the very near future.

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### **Lynda says**

I loved this cake cookbook for both the fascinating history of American baking, the wide range of cake recipes, the gorgeous and tempting photos of most recipes and the detailed recipes themselves. I can't wait to start baking!

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### **Katie says**

The recipes look delicious and I loved the history tidbits about all the different cakes, but I felt like the organization was not what I had expected. This is very much a cookbook with some snippets of history...it is not a nonfiction book about the history of American cake with some recipes sprinkled in. Also, the ebook version does not have an index/table of contents of the cakes, which means you have to turn to the chapter and then find each cake within the chapter, which is extremely annoying given that this really is more of a cookbook than a book.

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