



Hoecakes: **Women Documenting History**

Students will learn...

- To view recipes as a possible way for 18th c. women to documenting history
- To examine women's lives in the 18th c.

You will need...

- Hoecake recipe- [original](#) and fill in the blanks worksheet.
 - Hoecakes Discussion Questions
 - Nelly and Doll's Biographies Handout
 - *Optional*: Colonial Women Handout
 - *Optional*: Ingredients to make Hoecakes
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Opener: Documenting Women's Lives

- Ask your students about gender divisions amongst the 18th c. gentry. How do they think men's and women's tasks differed?
 - Explain that while we have numerous documents by George Washington related to politics, war, farming, etc, we have relatively little from Martha and other women from that period.
 - Brainstorm the written documents that women would have produced at this time- mostly letters and diaries.
 - Reveal recipes as a potential source of information on women's lives.
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Task: Reading between the Lines

- Show your students the original letter Frances Butler wrote to Elizabeth Gibson and Nelly's note with the hoecake recipe.
- Have them try to decipher the first couple of lines. Is it hard or easy?

- Now give them the fill in the blanks hoecake recipe. Does this look like recipes they have used/seen before? How is it similar or different?
- Ask your students to identify all the women involved in this recipe and their role in it:

- Nelly: author of the recipe
- Mrs. Gibson: asked for the recipe
- Frances: the intermediary, probably didn't know the recipe, which is why Nelly wrote it.

- Reveal that they are missing a big part of the story: Doll. Most likely, she would have made hoecakes for George Washington. Give them Nelly and Doll's biography handout.
 - Divide the class into groups and give them one question from the Discussion Questions handout. They should then create a story that answers this question. Also, have them show their thinking- what information or assumptions are they basing their story on?
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Closer: Sharing

- Have your students share their stories with each other. Does your class agree or disagree with their classmates' proposals?
- *Optional*: Read or give them the Colonial Women Handout
- Ask where they could look to answer their questions with more historical accuracy. (*Optional*: Have them do this research)
- *Optional*: Make hoecakes!

Biographies

Doll

Doll was thirty-eight years old when she arrived at Mount Vernon in 1759. She and her children were among the enslaved people whom Martha Custis brought to her marriage to George Washington, as part of her “dower” or widow’s share of her first husband’s estate.

At Mount Vernon, Martha assigned Doll as the estate’s cook until the 1780s. There she worked long hours in the kitchen preparing the hoecakes, smoked hams, and other Washington family favorites. Mount Vernon’s steady stream of visitors meant that Doll frequently had to prepare large and elaborate meals. She would have worked closely with Martha to plan each day’s menu and monitor ingredients. Though under her mistress’s supervision, the kitchen was Doll’s domain. She passed on her expertise to her daughter Lucy, who succeeded her mother as one of the estate’s cooks.



Eleanor (Nelly) Parke Custis Lewis



Eleanor Parke Custis (known as ‘Nelly’) was the one of Martha Washington’s for grandchildren. Her father, John Parke Custis, who was Martha and her first husband, Daniel Custis’s, son, died when she was two years old. Once her mother remarried, she and her younger brother went to live with the Washingtons.

Ten-year-old Nelly soon began music lessons, under the strict discipline of her grandmother. As she grew up, she became was an especially gifted harpsichord player. Nelly later received a formal education at a school in New York.

When she was 20 years old, she married Washington’s nephew, Lawrence Lewis. She had her first child, Frances, at Mount Vernon only 17 days before Washington died.

After Martha’s death, Nelly and Lawrence moved to nearby Woodlawn Plantation.

A recipe for hoecakes that Eleanor Park Custis Lewis, granddaughter to Martha Washington, wrote as a postscript on a letter her daughter, Francois Park Lewis was writing to their friend Mrs. Elizabeth Bordley Gibson in Philadelphia on January 7th, 1821.

Come on one side then the A-side & welcome. For the 1st Bill
 then the 2nd side must be
 inserted in the first instance. I will give you lately a
 with a piece of beef & salt - your letter, best thanks
 for the 1st of the 2nd of the 3rd of the 4th of the 5th of the 6th of the 7th of the 8th of the 9th of the 10th of the 11th of the 12th of the 13th of the 14th of the 15th of the 16th of the 17th of the 18th of the 19th of the 20th of the 21th of the 22th of the 23th of the 24th of the 25th of the 26th of the 27th of the 28th of the 29th of the 30th of the 31st of the 32nd of the 33rd of the 34th of the 35th of the 36th of the 37th of the 38th of the 39th of the 40th of the 41st of the 42nd of the 43rd of the 44th of the 45th of the 46th of the 47th of the 48th of the 49th of the 50th of the 51st of the 52nd of the 53rd of the 54th of the 55th of the 56th of the 57th of the 58th of the 59th of the 60th of the 61st of the 62nd of the 63rd of the 64th of the 65th of the 66th of the 67th of the 68th of the 69th of the 70th of the 71st of the 72nd of the 73rd of the 74th of the 75th of the 76th of the 77th of the 78th of the 79th of the 80th of the 81st of the 82nd of the 83rd of the 84th of the 85th of the 86th of the 87th of the 88th of the 89th of the 90th of the 91st of the 92nd of the 93rd of the 94th of the 95th of the 96th of the 97th of the 98th of the 99th of the 100th of the 101st of the 102nd of the 103rd of the 104th of the 105th of the 106th of the 107th of the 108th of the 109th of the 110th of the 111st of the 112nd of the 113rd of the 114th of the 115th of the 116th of the 117th of the 118th of the 119th of the 120th of the 121st of the 122nd of the 123rd of the 124th of the 125th of the 126th of the 127th of the 128th of the 129th of the 130th of the 131st of the 132nd of the 133rd of the 134th of the 135th of the 136th of the 137th of the 138th of the 139th of the 140th of the 141st of the 142nd of the 143rd of the 144th of the 145th of the 146th of the 147th of the 148th of the 149th of the 150th of the 151st of the 152nd of the 153rd of the 154th of the 155th of the 156th of the 157th of the 158th of the 159th of the 160th of the 161st of the 162nd of the 163rd of the 164th of the 165th of the 166th of the 167th of the 168th of the 169th of the 170th of the 171st of the 172nd of the 173rd of the 174th of the 175th of the 176th of the 177th of the 178th of the 179th of the 180th of the 181st of the 182nd of the 183rd of the 184th of the 185th of the 186th of the 187th of the 188th of the 189th of the 190th of the 191st of the 192nd of the 193rd of the 194th of the 195th of the 196th of the 197th of the 198th of the 199th of the 200th of the 201st of the 202nd of the 203rd of the 204th of the 205th of the 206th of the 207th of the 208th of the 209th of the 210th of the 211st of the 212nd of the 213rd of the 214th of the 215th of the 216th of the 217th of the 218th of the 219th of the 220th of the 221st of the 222nd of the 223rd of the 224th of the 225th of the 226th of the 227th of the 228th of the 229th of the 230th of the 231st of the 232nd of the 233rd of the 234th of the 235th of the 236th of the 237th of the 238th of the 239th of the 240th of the 241st of the 242nd of the 243rd of the 244th of the 245th of the 246th of the 247th of the 248th of the 249th of the 250th of the 251st of the 252nd of the 253rd of the 254th of the 255th of the 256th of the 257th of the 258th of the 259th of the 260th of the 261st of the 262nd of the 263rd of the 264th of the 265th of the 266th of the 267th of the 268th of the 269th of the 270th of the 271st of the 272nd of the 273rd of the 274th of the 275th of the 276th of the 277th of the 278th of the 279th of the 280th of the 281st of the 282nd of the 283rd of the 284th of the 285th of the 286th of the 287th of the 288th of the 289th of the 290th of the 291st of the 292nd of the 293rd of the 294th of the 295th of the 296th of the 297th of the 298th of the 299th of the 300th of the 301st of the 302nd of the 303rd of the 304th of the 305th of the 306th of the 307th of the 308th of the 309th of the 310th of the 311st of the 312nd of the 313rd of the 314th of the 315th of the 316th of the 317th

Jan. 10th 17th 1848
Mr. James Brown
No. 12. Mount Street
Birmingham

she accompanied me, a few days since
is happy to hear from ^{little} ~~the~~ he has
a year and that you were well—
say you are so good so to procure
Foster. He has received my Cousin
of Orleans, thought, and succeeded in
the Essex My former intention
to me, but I fear we shall not
to them much longer, they are
so happy in retirement, but their
in New York are anxious
their returns and as this cold
season, there is nothing to keep
in here, but their kind regards
and, most fashionable belles, were
very unwilling to spend a month
the middle of winter, when
led from any town, and with

It near a warm hearth (or in moderate fire) pour
it at candlelight. & let it remain until the next
morning - then add the remaining quart & a half
by degrees with a spoon. - when well mixed
let it stand 15 or 20 minutes & then bake it - if
you wish to make fine muffins - take a quarter
of this dough ^{in the morning} beat in a white & half of the yolk of an
egg & a 3/4 of a small lukewarm water as wide make
it like pancake batter drop a spoonful at a time
on a ~~pan~~ ^{hot} ~~pan~~ ^{hoc or griddle} as in way in the book, when

or Deers tuck are good when the heels are sore.
Spirit of turpentine, or soft soap are sometimes used
soaking the feet, ^{very warm water} too, is serviceable. → The bread
business is as follows - if you wish to make $2\frac{1}{2}$
quarts of flour ~~sup~~ - take at night one quart
of flour, ~~five~~ table spoonfuls of yeast & some
lukewarm water, as will make it the consist
pancake batter, mix it in a large stone pot & let

2.

it near a warm hearth (or ~~in~~ moderate fire) make
it at candlelight. ~~Let~~ it remain until the next
morning - then add the remaining quart & a half
by degrees with a spoon - when well mixed
let it stand 15 or 20 minutes & then bake it - if
you wish to make fine muffins - take a quart
of this dough ^{in the morning} beat up a white & half of the yolk of an
egg & add as much lukewarm water as will make
it like pancake batter. Drop a spoonful at a time
on a ~~griddle~~ hoe or griddle (as we say in the South) when

3.

done on one side turn the A. 569 Modicum. Jan'y 7th 1820
other. the griddle must be
rubbed in the first instance with a piece of beef suet
or the fat of cold corned beef for the articles - love to you
& Mr & all friends, yours ever faithful E. Lewis
To Major Conscience. thought me your kind

Hoecakes

A recipe for hoecakes that Eleanor Park Custis Lewis, granddaughter to Martha Washington, wrote as a postscript on a letter her daughter, Frances Park Lewis was writing to their friend Mrs. Elizabeth Bordley Gibson in Philadelphia on January 7th, 1821.

The bread business is as follows- if you wish to make 2 1/2 quarts of flour up- take at night one quart of flour, five table _____ of yeast & as much lukewarm water as will make it the consistency of pancake _____, mix it in a large stone pot & set it near a _____ hearth (or a moderate fire) make it at _____ & let it remain until the next morning- then add the remaining quart & a half by degrees with a spoon- when well mixed let it stand 15 or 20 minutes & then bake it- if you wish to make five _____ - take a quart of this dough in the morning, _____ up a white & half of the _____ of an egg & add as much _____ water as will make it like pancake batter, drop a spoonful at a time on a _____ or griddle (as we say in the South)- When done on one side turn the other- the griddle must be rubbed in the first instance with a piece of _____ suet or the fat of cold corned beef- Write you lately a long letter, but thanks for the articles- love to you Mr. G & all friends

yours ever faithfully

E P Lewis

The dish originated with Native Americans and subsequently was used by enslaved Africans and European settlers alike. Recipes varied, but the basic idea was a flat cake made of cornmeal mush. They were relatively easy to make and used simple ingredients and utensils. They would have been eaten frequently as breakfast food. Washington often ate hoecakes with honey or butter for breakfast.

Hoecake Discussion Questions

Instructions: Read Nelly's Hoecake Recipe and then discuss the following question with a partner. All these questions are theoretical and so do not have 'correct' answers.

Why did Elizabeth Gibson ask for the hoecake recipe? Who will make them in her household and whom will they be fed to?

How does George Washington fit into the story? How was he involved in planning and making the hoesakes?

How did Doll learn this recipe?

How did Doll pass this recipe on to her daughter, Lucy, who became a cook after her?

Where does Martha Washington fit into the story? How was she involved in planning and making the hoesakes?

What would it have been like to make hoesakes by candlelight? Who has making them?

Did Nelly ever really make hoesakes for George Washington? If so, on what occasions? If not, how does she know the recipe?

Why does Frances not give the recipe to Elizabeth Gibson? If she didn't know the recipe, why didn't Nelly teach her?

Colonial Women before the American Revolution

The boundaries between women's and men's tasks in the 18th-century were not as strict as they became in the 19th-century. The idea of a "delicate" woman who decorated the house and screamed when seeing a mouse is a 19th-century invention. In the 18th-century, while a woman's sphere was mostly confined to the house, garden, and farmyard, she was responsible for taking raw materials and converting them into consumable goods. For example, turning strawberries into jam or turning flax into thread and then clothing. Women were also responsible for killing animals for meals. Tasks that we consider feminine today, like spending money on home decor and ordering furniture was the man's job. Likewise, men were responsible for educating their children. Before the Revolution, women would take care of infants and perform domestic chores for children, but they were not responsible for their intellectual development and teaching them their role in society.

However, this only describes the experience of rural middle-class white women¹. Upper-class white women, like Martha Washington, had enslaved men and women doing these tasks as well. Martha was in charge of managing the enslaved workers and their tasks. Every day, Martha would plan the day's meals and supervise cooks like Doll in the kitchen. Therefore, Martha may have learned to make hoecakes to judge how Doll made them. This information could have been passed on to Nelly, so that she could manage her household.

¹ By 1750 middle class urban women did not engage in household production or tend gardens, etc.