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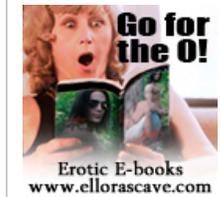
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## Spice Cake for High Tea from a Suffragist Cookbook

Posted by: [Marguerite Kearns](#) in [Eat Me](#) on Sep 12, 2011



When I was young, my mother told me about my suffragist grandmother Edna (that's her in the photo). "She did important work so women can vote today," my mother said. I took the story to heart. I couldn't wait until the subject of women's suffrage was raised in school. I imagined raising my hand, standing up in front of my classmates, and waxing lyrically about my grandma.

Nothing happened through the sixth grade. Or the seventh. It wasn't mentioned until the eighth grade when my social studies teacher summed up the women's suffrage movement in one sentence: "And then, women were **GIVEN** the vote in 1920." Bewildered and confused, I didn't raise my hand and talk about my grandmother who had died years before my birth. I was certain of one thing only. Women weren't given the vote. Nothing had been handed to them on a silver platter. Instead, they struggled hard for the vote, and it took more than 70 years. This became my first lesson in recognizing passive-voice history. During numerous college classes in history and other survey courses, Votes for Women didn't even merit a mention, not even in passive voice.



This is why I'm thrilled to be blogging about women's suffrage for *BUST*, which has a readership of folks who know about and appreciate our Votes for Women history. Which reminds me--my grandmother Edna Buckman Kearns was a blogger of sorts back in 1913. Of course, no one could have conceived of blogging back then, but grandmother Edna wrote about the suffrage movement on Long Island and in New York City as a blogger might express herself today.

Edna organized suffrage events. She participated in them and raced home to write up her eyewitness accounts. Then she filed her articles with the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* and with any other newspaper editor who would agree to print her material. You have to give Edna credit, as well as many other women like her at the turn of the 20th century

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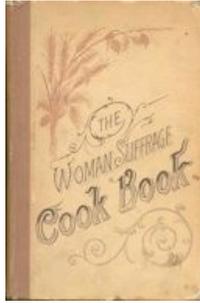
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who volunteered for the suffrage movement. They had hutzpah. They lived and acted on the razor's edge.

I spent Labor Day weekend baking cakes to honor these suffs. It was a belated celebration for Women's Equality Day on August 26th. I needed help from my sister and niece who not only pitched in with the cooking, but also humored me by setting the table for a tea party and getting everyone to the table. We pulled fancy clothes out of the closet and turned the tea party into a major event.



The tea party's highlight was a spice cake made from a recipe found in an 1886 publication, *The Woman Suffrage Cookbook* by Hattie A. Burr. It's somewhat before Edna's time as a suffragist, but the cake was much like what my grandmother and her mother would have prepared for a tea party.

The [suffrage cookbook is online and free](#) for the download. The recipe is attributed to Harriet C. Batchelder, no doubt one of the tens of thousands of suffs like my grandmother across the nation who hit the streets for Votes for Women. They wrote and distributed suffrage literature, smiled and dialed the phone when organizing their communities. The suffs canvassed from door to door, lobbied their representatives, signed petitions, and kept the issue of Votes for Women alive for years. Here's the recipe:

**Spice Cake (page 98): Two eggs, one and one-half cupfuls sugar, half cupful butter, half cupful milk, two and one-half cupfuls flour, half cupful raisins, a little of all kinds of spice, quarter teaspoon soda.**

That's the entire recipe straight from the book. Note that there are no instructions about the order in which to mix the ingredients, or how long and at what temperature to bake the cake. Women used a variety of ovens back then, including wood-burning stoves. We added more spices than the recipe called for and baked the cake in a Dutch oven in my sister's kiva fireplace.



The outcome was a delicious pound cake, even if it was burned around the edges. It was a hit, not to mention a treasure to present on the table with hot tea and the carrot cake I whipped up from a mix. We used the occasion to celebrate the 91st anniversary of women voting in the United States.

I look at this this way. Eating the cake that's like what my grandmother and great-grandmother might have baked brought us closer to the players in this fabulous part of American history--the suffrage movement. Which reminds me. Whenever you ever catch me writing in passive voice, give my coat a tug.

*Photos: Edna Buckman Kearns, 1915. From the family photo archives. Suffrage demonstration in New York City from the Library of Congress photo collection. Party-goer on Labor Day 2011 eating spice cake from the 1886 cookbook. Photo by Marguerite Kearns.*

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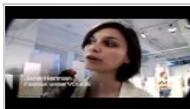
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