

LA-UR-21-29476

Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.

Title: Celebrate National Cake Day with a recipe from the Lab's history
The Manhattan Project scientists were partially fueled by ...
chocolate cake

Author(s): Templeton, Patricia A.

Intended for: Web

Issued: 2021-09-27

Disclaimer:

Los Alamos National Laboratory, an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer, is operated by Triad National Security, LLC for the National Nuclear Security Administration of U.S. Department of Energy under contract 89233218CNA000001. By approving this article, the publisher recognizes that the U.S. Government retains nonexclusive, royalty-free license to publish or reproduce the published form of this contribution, or to allow others to do so, for U.S. Government purposes. Los Alamos National Laboratory requests that the publisher identify this article as work performed under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Energy. Los Alamos National Laboratory strongly supports academic freedom and a researcher's right to publish; as an institution, however, the Laboratory does not endorse the viewpoint of a publication or guarantee its technical correctness.

Celebrate National Cake Day with a recipe from the Lab's history

The Manhattan Project scientists were partially fueled by ... chocolate cake

By Patty Templeton, archivist, [National Security Research Center](#)

In 27 months, Manhattan Project scientists created the world's first nuclear weapons. They had a six-day workweek and a goal of harnessing atomic power before Adolf Hitler did. Amidst this constant stress, morale building was in order.

In a nod to National Cake Day (November 26), here's how one woman and her chocolate cake had a role in building scientists' spirits as they discovered how to turn atoms into energy.

When Los Alamos scientists needed a break, they drove halfway to Santa Fe and stopped at Otowi Crossing. Near a wood suspension bridge, too rickety for Army trucks to cross, Edith Warner had a tea room, a single gas pump and a small guest cottage.

Soon-to-be Lab Director J. Robert Oppenheimer met Warner in the summer of 1937. Years later, after the then-secret Los Alamos Lab was up and running, Oppenheimer convinced his boss, Gen. Leslie Groves, to allow scientists to visit Warner's home for dinner, as long as it was closed to the public.

Throughout the war, Warner offered dinner at \$2 a head and didn't accept tips. She served five to six couples a night, sometimes having two seatings, but eventually had to scale back for health reasons. No running water, no electricity and a wood stove made for a 16-hour shift.

Warner had no phone. According to her collected writings, Manhattan Project physicist and future Lab director "Harold Agnew recalls how he made reservations a minute after midnight when Edith said she had a couple of openings and would give them on a first-come basis on a certain date. He said he wasn't the only one there at that hour with the same idea."

Oppenheimer had a standing weekly reservation. Other regulars included the Lab's top scientists Norris Bradbury, Phillip Morrison, Edward Teller, Stanislaw Ulam, Hans Bethe, Enrico Fermi and Niels Bohr – all used pseudonyms to make their reservations.

Warner served garden-to-table fare. A typical meal included boiled corn, five varieties of squash (she grew 10), ragout (seasoned meat stewed with vegetables; pronounced ra-goo) and chocolate cake with raspberries.

You can make the cake the scientists adored. Warner freely shared her recipe. This version appeared in *The House at Otowi Bridge* by Peggy Pond Church.

Edith Warner's Chocolate Loaf Cake

2 eggs, beaten

1 cup granulated sugar

2 $\frac{1}{3}$ cups flour, sifted three times

½ teaspoon salt
2 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon vanilla
½ cup milk
1 ½ ounces baker's chocolate
4 tablespoons butter

Preheat oven to 250°F. Grease and flour a 9-inch by 5-inch loaf pan.

Mix eggs, sugar and flour. Mix in milk gradually. Mix in salt, vanilla and baking powder. Melt together baker's chocolate and butter. Beat all ingredients together until light.

Bake 1 hour total. First 15 minutes at 250°F. Next 15 minutes at 275°F. Remainder of time at 300°F.

Icing

3 heaping tablespoons cocoa
1 ½ cups powdered sugar
½ teaspoon vanilla
2 tablespoons melted butter
About 2 tablespoons coffee or milk

Sift sugar and cocoa together. Beat all ingredients until smooth.

Notes

The recipe is slightly altered for clarity and the measurements are standardized. Baking times and temperatures are approximated. (Edith Warner didn't list oven temperatures or times and used a wood stove.) Increase cake moistness by decreasing baking powder to 1 teaspoon and increasing milk 1 tablespoon. When available, Edith Warner added raspberries.

IMAGES



CAPTION CAKE OPTION 1:

According to *In the Shadow of Los Alamos*, Lab director J. Robert Oppenheimer said of Edith Warner, "We had tea and chocolate cake and talk; it was my first unforgettable meeting."

CAKE OPTION 1 LINK:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SqJEUeAitl839QIAJhnVI550dUTUPxRB/view?usp=sharing>



CAPTION CAKE OPTION 2:

According to *In the Shadow of Los Alamos*, Lab director J. Robert Oppenheimer said of Edith Warner, "We had tea and chocolate cake and talk; it was my first unforgettable meeting."

LINK: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1olpRsneb0qllkBAZciYvSBhTtjfaLTe3/view?usp=sharing>



CAPTION:

The Otowi Suspension Bridge crossing the Rio Grande River. Photos of Otowi Bridge and Edith Warner's chocolate cake are part of the collections in the National Security Resource Center.

LINK:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1T5_g2Hxtdt04s-YNEsYwuWskex41L-rS/view?usp=sharing

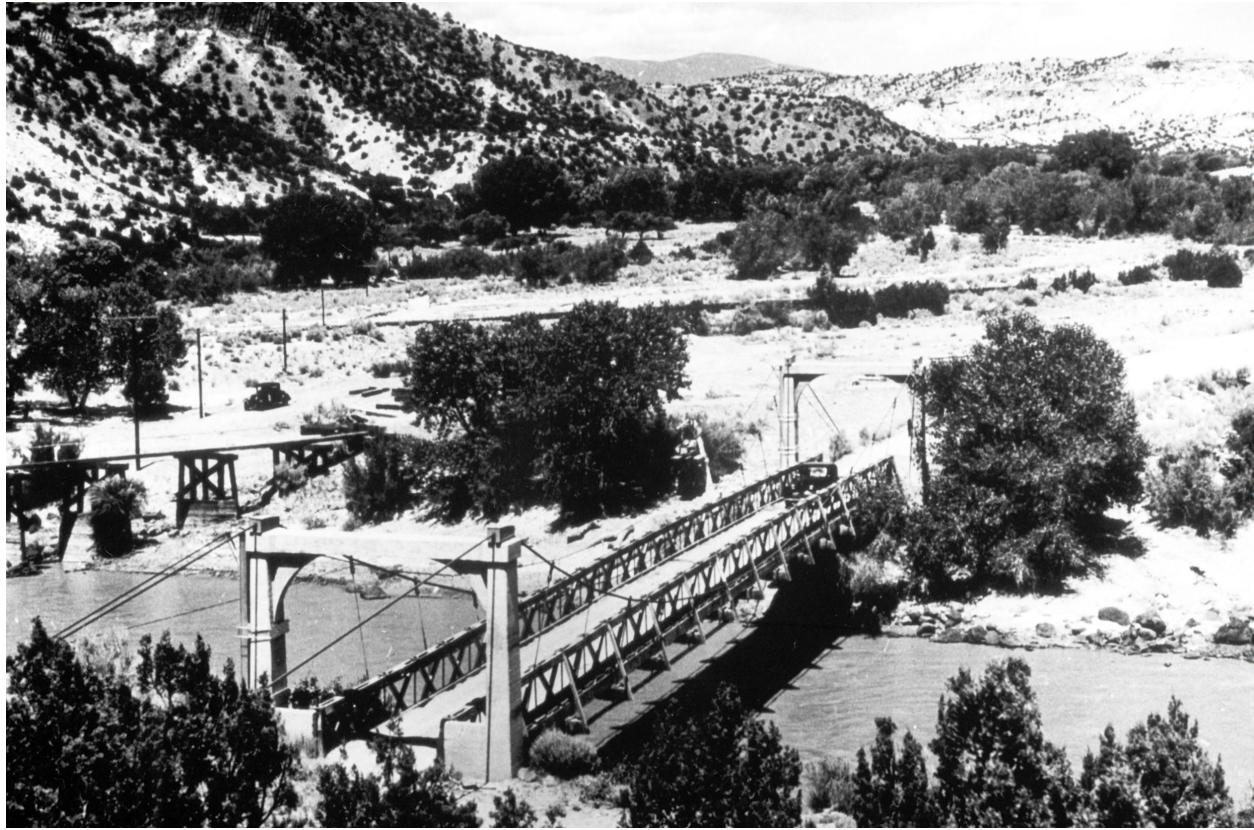


CAPTION:

Edith Warner's tea room was popular with wartime scientists thanks, in part, to her chocolate cake. "They come in through the kitchen door, talk a bit before leaving, and are booked up weeks ahead," Warner said of her patrons in her collected writings. "Because they are isolated and need even this change for morale, I feel it is definitely a war job for me." (photo courtesy of the Atomic Heritage Foundation)

LINK:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Vayg8_V73ZcgRsC0rgTv1g3b9-oh8Zup/view?usp=sharing



CAPTION: The Otowi Suspension Bridge crossing the Rio Grande River towards Edith Warner's house. To the left is the bridge that the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad's Chili Line used until it stopped service in 1941.

LINK:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pLwc8REzjluXQhjc0jOxRXHUZtALwOWC/view?usp=sharing>