



## Failed Cake to Family Favorite: Brownie History

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The story of the brownie starts over 2,200 years ago when the Myans began mashing and eating the beans of the cacao plant – and chocolate was born. Chocolate was unknown outside of the New World before Christopher Columbus arrived in 1492. Columbus returned to Spain with chocolate which he presented to Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand along with many other treasures.

Chocolate's big break came in 1519 when Hernando Cortez met the Aztec King Montezuma. Montezuma introduced Cortez to the royal drink, "chocolati". It was bitter, so Cortez decided to sweeten it with cane sugar. By the time this version of chocolati reached Spain it was mixed with two other imports, cinnamon and vanilla. Served hot this new mixture quickly became a favorite of Spain's aristocracy. It was so prized, Spain managed to keep the wonder of chocolate a secret from the rest of Europe for nearly 100 years.

In America chocolate was first enjoyed as an unsweetened after dinner beverage served like coffee. Later it was sweetened with sugar. Before the mid-1700s both chocolate and sugar were expensive ingredients so chocolate was reserved for the wealthiest members of society. Chocolate's journey to becoming a national favorite took a big step in 1780 when Dr. James Baker opened the first chocolate factory (Baker's Chocolate). Cocoa powder arrived in stores in 1828 and the first chocolate candy bar was introduced in 1842. By the late 1800s American cooks were baking chocolate cakes and their families were eating them up.



On such cook was Mildred Brown Schrupf of Bangor, Maine. According to the story, she was baking a chocolate cake and, through what would become a very happy accident, Mildred forgot to add the leavening to her recipe. The cake failed to rise. But Mildred was a frugal cook and she decided not to waste the flat cake. She cut it into squares and an American legend was born! The newly created "Bangor Brownies" became a local favorite.

The first brownie recipe was published in the 1906 edition of Fanny Farmer's Boston Cooking-School Cook Book. A year later the Walter M. Lowney Company in Boston was looking for ways to increase sales of their chocolate products. The

hired Maria Willet Howard to write a series of recipes featuring their chocolate. Published in 1907, Lowney's Cookbook contained the second published brownie recipe.

Brownies became popular across America beginning in the 1920s. Today a search of the internet can discover over 100,000 brownie recipes. The variations seem endless, containing everything from candy to coffee beans. Take a taste of history and try the original brownie recipes.

### **Boston Cooking-School Cook Book, 1918**

1 cup sugar  
¼ cup melted butter  
1 egg, unbeaten  
2 squares unsweetened chocolate, melted  
¾ teaspoon vanilla  
½ cup flour  
½ walnut meats, cut in pieces

Mix ingredients in order given. Line a seven-inch square pan with paraffine paper. Spread mixture evenly in the pan and bake in a slow oven. As soon as taken from oven turn from pan, remove paper, and cut cake into strips, using a sharp knife. If these directions are not followed paper will cling to cake, and it will be impossible to cut in sharply even pieces.

Notes for the modern cook: We used cooking spray in place of the paraffine paper. Try baking the brownies at 325° for 30 minutes.

## **Lowney's Brownies - Lowney's Cook Book, 1907**

½ cup butter  
1 cup sugar  
2 squares Lowney's Premium Chocolate  
2 eggs  
½ cup nut meats  
½ cup flour  
¼ teaspoon salt

Cream butter, add remaining ingredients, spread on buttered sheets, and bake ten to fifteen minutes. Cut squares as soon as taken from oven.

Notes for modern cook: Our batch took 30 minutes at 325°. The end product is cake-like and slightly less chocolaty.



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