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Whittier and Laguna Beach



1908–1922

Born in Albion, Michigan, on July 3, 1908, Mary Frances Kennedy was nurtured on the collective wisdom of *The Settlement Cookbook*, *The Boston Cooking-School Cookbook*, *The Miriam Cookbook*, and the “tried and true” recipes gathered and handed down to Edith Holbrook Kennedy by her mother. The transition from liquids to solids, cereals to fruit and vegetable purees, eggs to patties was well charted in those new-to-nutrition days and no doubt initiated the first stages of Mary Frances’s developing palate. Of course, it is impossible to know what Edith served to her dynamic husband, Rex, when they took up housekeeping in Albion, but an extensive railroad grid had made it possible to ship foodstuffs across a country where food was becoming one of the most important industries. Libby, McNeil & Libby had built the world’s largest canning factory in Sunnyvale, California; Ford had introduced a Model T that was said to be stronger than a horse and could be adapted to be an ideal pickup truck for farmers; and Ellen Swallow Richards had founded the American Economics Association to raise the status of homemaking.

In the Kennedy kitchen at 202 Irwin Avenue, Mary Frances’s mother, Edith, relied on household help, as her own mother had done in Onawa,



202 Irwin Avenue, Albion, Michigan

Iowa, where Scandinavian and German girls eagerly did the cooking and other chores while learning the language of their adopted country. Edith's ideas about domestic life were undoubtedly influenced by the table set by her own mother, Mary Frances Holbrook, and by the year she had spent abroad when she was twenty-two. After Edith married Rex Kennedy, the editor of the *Albion Evening Recorder*, she served her husband meals in the dining room, a formal room with a door that separated it from the menial tasks of the kitchen. Rex liked waffles for breakfast, and Edith made them from a favorite recipe in *The Miriam Cookbook*. For dinner, she might have prepared a plump chicken from a nearby farm, or a beef roast shipped from Chicago (Albion was on the main railroad line between Chicago and Detroit). Whatever the entrée, the side dish, or the dessert, the meal would have showcased the bounty of the Midwest. And Edith would have exhibited her skill and her preference for sweets by

whipping up a batch of divinity fudge or, every year on his birthday, a Lady Baltimore cake for her husband.

When Edith and Rex decided to leave Albion for the West Coast in 1911, Mary Frances was almost three and her sister, Anne, was eleven months old. The family's first stop was Spokane, where they visited Rex's youngest brother, Ted, and his parents, who had recently moved there from Iowa. Mary Frances often said that her earliest memories dated back to those months in Washington, where she saw row after row of apple trees outside of Spokane and played in abandoned rowboats on Maury Island, scooping water out of their unseaworthy bottoms. If so, did the smell of the fruit orchards and the taste of the ocean during that magical summer become a part of her food memory, and did they foreshadow her fondness for applesauce and baked apples and the compelling, briny taste of oysters? It is tempting to think so.

In *The Gastronomical Me*, Mary Frances wrote that her transformative food experiences actually began in Whittier, California, where Rex Kennedy moved his family after purchasing the local newspaper in the fall of 1912. Citrus, olive, and walnut trees grew on the outskirts of the small, predominantly Quaker community, and fields of wheat and grazing pastures stretched from Whittier west to Los Angeles. The first self-service grocery stores opened independently in various towns, and the New Nutrition advocated by Sylvester Graham and practiced by John Harvey Kellogg at the Battle Creek Sanitarium held sway, especially in the dietary requirements of Grandmother Holbrook, who had joined her daughter, son-in-law, and two granddaughters in their home at 115 Painter Avenue.

"The first thing I remember tasting and then wanting to taste again is the grayish-pink fuzz my grandmother skimmed from a spitting kettle of strawberry jam," Mary Frances wrote, describing the sight, smell, and

taste of a huge kettle of jam simmering on the stove of the kitchen on Painter Avenue. The only room in the large, comfortable house to escape Rex's remodeling efforts, the kitchen became etched in Mary Frances's imagination as one of the ugliest rooms she had ever known and loved. Outfitted with a gas stove, a small icebox, and many cupboards, the room was dominated by a large table with a chipped enamel top and bins for flour and sugar built into each side. Two small windows high above the sink and a single bulb hanging over the table provided the only light in the narrow room. Despite its limitations, this kitchen became her schoolroom and playground, where from her fourth year to her twelfth she learned the power of a delicious dish served to appreciative diners in the formal dining room on the other side of the swinging door. There, Rex sat at one end of the table with his back to the kitchen, and Edith positioned herself at the opposite end in order to summon the cook of the moment by ringing a little silver bell placed without fail near her right hand.

In *Among Friends*, a memoir of her first twelve years, Mary Frances chronicled the "high priests and priestesses" who appeared and disappeared through that kitchen door during her early preschool years. A black woman named Cynthia was the first, and Mary Frances and Anne loved the soft hymns Cynthia hummed as she went about her work in the kitchen. While they sat at the table in the middle of the room, Cynthia told them stories and gave them samples of whatever she was preparing for her evening meal. But Cynthia left after her first winter in Whittier because she was lonely. Amimoto, an Asian student who sought to supplement his allowance by serving as houseboy, replaced her, and his tenure was even shorter.

Later on, after all four of the McLure sisters, who lived nearby, had taken their turn in the Kennedy kitchen, a South African woman named

Ora arrived. With her sharp knives and kitchen savvy, Ora worked transformations on everyday foods. She decorated pies with stars cut from thinly rolled dough, shaved carrots into thin curls, and minced herbs. During her reign, pastry fleurons and sprigs of parsley enhanced even the lowliest dishes of hash. From Ora, Mary Frances began to learn presentation and the subtle art of using condiments other than salt and pepper.

Although Grandmother Holbrook and Edith usually hired the housekeeper of the moment, Rex brought other unlikely helpers into the house on Painter Avenue. For a brief period, Mary Frances and Anne commandeered kitchen stools on Sunday afternoons to watch the handyman, Charles, make butterscotch that looked like “panes of colored crystal.” Everyone rated the homemade candy second to none, until the children innocently explained Charles’s secrets to their mother. Not only did the master candy maker forage for lollipop sticks in and around the playground at the Bailey Street School, he also protected his thumb and forefinger with a generous amount of spittle before testing the temperature of the molten, tawny butterscotch. Shortly after these revelations, Charles’s efforts in the kitchen mysteriously ceased.

There was also a cook named Anita, whom one of Rex’s friends prevailed on him to hire. She enchanted the children with stories of taking lessons from the chef of the king of Spain, but her culinary skills were, unfortunately, limited. To provide simple meals, Mary Frances and Anne chopped and mashed vegetables, scrambled eggs, and made toast while Anita spent days preparing her favorite dishes—elegant chicken enchiladas and a vanilla flan—from her limited repertoire. While Edith Kennedy retired to her chaise longue upstairs to avoid the crashing sounds emanating from the kitchen, Anita would turn out her flan, a perfect *crème renversée*. Mary Frances never forgot “the brown subtle liquid

running at just the proper speed over its flat surface and down its impeccably sloping sides.”

Edith Kennedy, who was an avid reader, reserved her culinary activities in Whittier for the occasional dishes that she enjoyed making: egg croquettes for the family during Lent, cookies for the Christmas holidays, and an airy cheese puff for special occasions.

In daily menu planning, Edith deferred to the wishes and dietary constraints of her mother. A woman of more than a few midwestern convictions, Grandmother Holbrook clung to the habit of eating root vegetables, even though a variety of fresh vegetables was available all year long in California. She also insisted on ladling white sauce over carrots, dried beef, and virtually everything else. She would eat no fried foods or pastries, no oils, and no seasonings. Above all, she allowed no displays of “sinful” pleasure in the food served at the dining room table.

An observant child, Mary Frances realized that there was a very real connection between the food prepared in the kitchen and the ambience of the dining room. Grandmother’s diet dictated menus of watery lettuce served with boiled dressing; overcooked hen accompanied by stodgy dumplings; and stewed tomatoes bound with soggy bread. Whenever Grandmother was absent, a partylike spirit prevailed. Rex served a thick broiled steak, a salad of freshly picked watercress dressed with fine olive oil, and glasses of red wine from a vineyard in nearby San Gabriel. By the time Mary Frances was six, she knew the names of several local wines and was allowed to have her own stemmed glass with a little wine that had been diluted with water. Rex also served his daughters “blotters,” slices of white bread dipped into the steak’s natural juices. Although these savory treats were high on their list of favorites, what they really loved was when Edith allowed them to hollow out their cupcakes and fill them with cream and sugar. They would remove the cupcake’s cap, scoop out the crumbs, place

cream and sugar in the hollowed base, replace the lid, and top with more sugar and cream. Eating this dessert slowly was a heavenly “indulgence.” The contrast between the bland, mid-Victorian meals that accommodated Grandmother’s diet and Rex’s favorite dishes made a lasting impression on Mary Frances, who would one day celebrate the thrill of a freshly baked peach pie and the glory of the first peas of the season as examples of the best meals she ever ate.

Another kitchen where memorable culinary experiences occurred was in the home of Edith Kennedy’s friend Gwendolyn Nettleship, who lived in a shabby farmhouse on the corner of Painter and Philadelphia. Mary Frances and Anne adored “Aunt” Gwen, a former missionary who spoke with a British accent and read *Uncle Remus* and *The Jungle Book* to them. The Nettleship kitchen, dominated by a large wood-burning stove and a round table, was the congenial place where Aunt Gwen served her brothers robust meals before eating her own supper, occasionally in the company of Mary Frances and Anne. Of those shared experiences Mary Frances wrote: “I decided at the age of nine that one of the best ways to grow up is to eat and talk quietly with good people.” Memories of the checkered oilcloth that covered the table, the china dotted with pink carnations, and dishes such as cocoa toast and fried egg sandwiches remained with Mary Frances throughout her life.

Soon after the Kennedys had settled in Whittier, they had acquired a cottage forty-two miles away, in Laguna Beach. The beach house was a retreat to which Rex and the family fled on Saturday afternoon after the newspaper was printed. Fresh lettuces and other produce were purchased on the Canyon Road leading into the town, and there was still enough light to reel in a fish to fry for the evening meal. Sundays were frequently spent in spontaneous meals with friends from Whittier, who welcomed an invitation to relax after a week in town. Their potluck meals included



Beach house, Laguna Beach, California

homemade scones, bowls of chicken salad, and crusty bread brought from Whittier, and these dishes were often supplemented by freshly caught rock bass and Edith's prodigious batches of fried corn oysters. On Sunday afternoons, the table, which was usually centered in the sunny lean-to kitchen, was pulled into the dining room, and sometimes even lengthened so that it extended through the wide doorway into the living room, in order to accommodate all of the guests. At the beach house, Edith cooked the family's meals, and her third daughter, Norah, remembers that they were hearty and delicious. Laguna Beach offered a freer and more informal opportunity for Edith to slip out of the mode of the editor's wife who presided over a proper household.

During the summer months, when they were on vacation from school, Mary Frances and Anne stayed at the beach house with Aunt Gwen. They

harvested mussels, steamed them over a makeshift coal fire outside of the kitchen, then rushed them into the house and ate them with a squeeze of lemon juice, a drizzle of melted butter, and a slice of fresh bread. Or Aunt Gwen made her special fried onions in the same pan she used to fry fish and heat breakfast, wiping the pan clean with newspaper between preparations. She sliced the onions into rings, coated them in seasoned flour, deep-fried them to a golden color, and served them with cold milk. These satisfying suppers were magical because they were delicious meals composed of only one or two dishes, consumed by hungry children who had spent a day playing on the beach.

The simplicity of the meals in Laguna Beach contrasted with the elegance of the meals in the Los Angeles restaurants where Edith occasionally took her daughters to celebrate a birthday, see a Gilbert and Sullivan performance, or attend the ballet. On her first trip to the Victor Hugo Restaurant, Mary Frances ordered chicken à la king because she had heard her mother mention the dish. This impressive outing set the standard for other special meals, which often consisted of something exotic served under glass and flambéed desserts prepared tableside. Edith and her daughters also frequented an ice cream parlor called the Pig 'n' Whistle near the Pacific Electric Depot in Los Angeles. After a day of shopping, they would sit in one of the booths and eat scoops of flavored ice cream out of long silver boats before boarding the electric train back to Whittier. Because Mary Frances and Anne were accustomed to eating at a table where children were silent unless spoken to, these dining occasions away from home made a deep impression on them. They could smile at the waiter and tell him how delicious the food tasted, and they could giggle with Edith when the ice cream melted into a colorful, rich pool. "Best of all, we talked-laughed-sang-kissed and in general exposed ourselves to sensations forbidden when the matriarchal stomach rumbled among us,"

Mary Frances wrote. "And my thoughts on how gastronomy should influence the pattern of any happy person's life became more and more firm."

It was not long before Mary Frances began to be curious about the power associated with the preparation of food and about what she could make happen when she prepared meals for the people she loved. One Sunday she volunteered to make supper for her sister and herself while her parents were visiting friends, and she chose Hindu eggs, an old standby for the cook's night off. She began by boiling eggs and slicing bread for toast. Then she consulted the *Settlement Cookbook* for a recipe to spice up the sauce and bind the dish together. She found a variation of béchamel sauce that appealed to her because the ingredients included a pinch of curry powder. Wanting to be sure that the exotic-sounding curry flavored the sauce adequately, she added more than a few teaspoons to the sauce before mixing it with the eggs and spooning the combination over pieces of toast. Anne, whether out of loyalty or fear, ate as much of the potent concoction as her older sister did. During the next few hours they drank copious amounts of milk, put soothing oil on their lips, and hoped that these remedies would bring relief to their burning mouths.

Mary Frances's next culinary effort was potentially more disastrous, as creativity once again triumphed over caution. While Edith was recovering from the birth of her third child, Norah, in the late spring of 1917, Mary Frances found a recipe in the well-worn pages of *The Invalid's Cookery Book* and prepared a bland pudding for her mother. When she unmolded it, the white pudding on its white saucer looked so unattractive that she picked a handful of black berries from a backyard bush and arranged them in a ring around the pudding. Within an hour the nurse found Edith covered with red welts and the baby screaming with hunger. The nurse summoned Rex, who in turn called the doctor, who diagnosed



Mary Frances, Edith, Norah, and Anne, Whittier, 1917



With Norah and Aunt Gwen, Laguna Beach, 1919

food poisoning. Explanations were given, and a crushed Mary Frances retreated to the dubious comfort of *Ivanhoe*.

Although some of these failures were dramatic in their retelling, most of Mary Frances's efforts in the Painter Avenue kitchen satisfied her curiosity and were a source of pride to her mother. On Thursdays, the cook's day off, Mary Frances occasionally asked to prepare the evening meal. Having mastered white sauce by the time she was seven, she knew how to measure and sift flour and add just the right amount of butter and liquid to keep the whole thing bubbling on the stove. At the proper moment, she combined the sauce with canned tuna, chipped beef, or vegetables and served the mixture over toast. She also could poach eggs and scramble them with the appropriate heat and care. Praise for a job well done was motivation for additional experiments, and she was a quick study.

Mary Frances was able to focus on the family, and especially their meals together, because Whittier was relatively unaffected by what went on in the rest of the world. During the early years of World War I, the largely Quaker community did not experience the soaring food prices of New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, where people rioted because they could not feed their families. Although there were a few examples of anti-German sentiment, and the local butcher and sausage-maker was forced to close his shop because he was German, the pacifist community did not rally to the war effort. When America entered the war in 1917, and Rex entertained the idea of enlisting, Edith informed him that their fourth child was on the way and the family would need his presence as well as his income as co-owner and editor of the *Whittier News*.

Five months after the birth of David Holbrook Kennedy in May 1919, Rex purchased a large house and orange ranch on thirteen acres of land on a southern extension of Painter Avenue in an unincorporated area of Whittier. The Ranch, as it came to be called, brought a new freedom to

Mary Frances, Anne, Norah, and David. No longer living on a busy street in the middle of town, the Kennedy children played among the cluster of buildings that included a guesthouse, cookhouse, barn, sheds, garages, and chicken coops. They gathered flowers, climbed the fruit trees, and cared for the Ranch menagerie, which included a cow, chickens, and bees.

In contrast to their earlier kitchen, the kitchen at the Ranch was light and filled with the smells of orange blossoms, and the family meals increasingly reflected the bounty of the Ranch. And after Grandmother Holbrook died in 1921, the family's diet became positively "heathenish," according to Mary Frances. Milk, cream, and butter from the cow contributed to a rich diet of puddings and an orgy of baking. Fresh eggs were used for mayonnaise, omelets, and cakes. The orchards and citrus grove provided fruit in season, and Rex planted a vegetable garden of artichokes, asparagus, and green leafy lettuces. The meals prepared in the Ranch kitchen were adventures, and Mary Frances was an eager participant.

She learned to churn and mold butter and to assemble ingredients for cakes that Edith baked on Saturday mornings, including her annual birthday cake for Rex. In later years, Mary Frances credited her mother with teaching her the art of cake baking, especially layer cakes with various fruit and nut fillings, which she, however, rarely made. Mary Frances also prepared afternoon tea for her mother and the Whittier ladies who visited the house. Although as a teenager she complained about this responsibility, she secretly prided herself on the fact that Edith thought her tea trays second to none. This approval motivated forays into assembling nasturtium leaf sandwiches, trimmed and thinly sliced, as well as decorating dainty miniature teacakes.

Whether it was those early kitchen adventures or the simple enjoyment of sitting "before a bowl of cold white grains of rice, half-floating

in the creamy milk and the brown sugar I could add from my own little pitcher or dish,” or ladling warm buttery sauce over tender stalks of asparagus before arranging the vegetables over toast, or pouring “cold thick cream over the hot delights” of apple dumplings, the gift of those formative years in Whittier was an appreciation of the pleasures of the table. Mary Frances also discovered that the kitchen could be a source of personal power: “The stove, the bins, the cupboards made an inviolable throne room. From them I ruled . . . and I loved that feeling.”

Fried Onion Rings

Mary Frances liked to say that onions were as much a part of her cooking as eggs and brown sugar. She added sliced sweet onions to many of her salads and braised vegetable dishes and regularly used green onions, leeks, and other members of the lily family in her cooking. Aunt Gwen's fried onion rings, probably made with bacon fat, were a particularly delicious food memory from her childhood vacation days in Laguna Beach. Re-created here, the simple dish, accompanied by only a glass of cold milk, was described by Mary Frances as a complete—and satisfying—meal. *Serves 4*

ONIONS

4 large sweet onions
1½ cups milk
1½ cups water

BATTER

1 egg
1 cup buttermilk
1 cup flour
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon baking soda

Vegetable oil for deep-frying

Cut the onions into ¼-inch-thick slices, and separate the slices into rings. Combine the milk and water in a bowl, add the onion rings, and let soak for 1 hour. Remove the onion rings from the liquid and pat dry.

To make the batter: mix together the egg and buttermilk in a bowl until blended. Add the flour, salt, and baking soda and stir until smooth.

Preheat the oven to 200 degrees.

Pour oil to a depth of about 3 inches into a deep, heavy pot and heat to 375 degrees. Working in small batches, dip the onion rings into the batter and carefully slip them into the hot oil. Fry until golden brown, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove and drain on absorbent paper. Keep in the oven until all the onions are fried.

Serve piping hot.

Hindu Eggs

Adapted from An Alphabet for Gourmets

In 1949, Mary Frances “returned to the scene of the crime,” revisiting a dish she had made as a young girl with little regard for the original recipe. (Quadrupling the amount of curry in the cream sauce, she served the eggs to her younger sister and ate them herself as well, to their common discomfort.) Here is a revised version that mixes curry powder into the filling and omits it in the sauce. The eggs and their sauce can be served atop toasted English muffins with a generous slice of fried Canadian or regular bacon. *Serves 6*

12 eggs, hard-boiled and peeled

¼ cup crème fraîche

¼ cup mayonnaise

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard

1 tablespoon curry powder

2 green onions, white part only, finely chopped

1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh parsley

1 tablespoon snipped fresh chives

Salt

Freshly ground white pepper

BÉCHAMEL SAUCE

2 tablespoons butter, cut into small pieces

2 tablespoons flour

½ teaspoon salt

2 cups whole milk, warmed

Pinch ground nutmeg

Ground white pepper to taste

Slice each egg in half lengthwise. Put the yolks in a bowl and mash them with the crème fraîche, mayonnaise, and mustard until smooth. Stir in the curry powder, green onions, parsley, and chives. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Divide the yolk mixture evenly among 12 of the egg halves, mounding it slightly. Top the filled halves with the remaining halves to re-form whole eggs. Butter a shallow casserole large enough to hold the eggs in a single layer, arrange them in the casserole, cover, and refrigerate for a few hours.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

To make the béchamel sauce: in a heavy saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat. Stir in the flour with a wooden spoon, add the salt, and stir constantly until smooth, 2 to 3 minutes. Gradually pour in the milk while stirring constantly, add the nutmeg and white pepper, and then continue to cook, stirring often, until the sauce coats the back of the spoon, about 10 minutes.

Cover the eggs with the warm cream sauce and place in the oven. Bake until the sauce bubbles and turns brown around the edges, 30 to 40 minutes. Serve immediately.

Edith's Cheese Puff

Adapted from *With Bold Knife and Fork*

Although she typically relied on domestics to prepare meals, Edith also had a few tricks up her sleeve for when a fast lunch or supper was needed. Known under a variety of names, this strata was one of her specialties. She passed the recipe on to her daughter, who would never have dreamed of making it with squishy-fresh bread, skim milk, or packaged cheese slices. *Serves 6*

4 eggs

2 cups whole milk

½ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon freshly ground white pepper

3 tablespoons butter, softened

9 slices day-old Italian bread, crusts removed

½ pound American cheddar cheese, grated

In a bowl, beat the eggs until blended. Add the milk, salt, and pepper and mix well.

Lightly butter a 2-quart soufflé dish or casserole. Spread the remaining butter on one side of the bread slices. Arrange a layer of the bread slices, buttered side up, in the bottom of the prepared dish, and top with some of the grated cheese. Repeat with the remaining bread slices and cheese, ending with a bread layer. Pour the egg-milk mixture over the slices. Let stand at room temperature for at least 1 hour, or cover and refrigerate overnight.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Bake until puffed and golden brown around the edges, about 1 hour. Serve immediately.

Lady Baltimore Cake

During her childhood, Mary Frances associated a Lady Baltimore cake with special occasions, like her father's birthday. Why this traditional white layer cake, which had become identified with the city of Baltimore, appealed to her mother is not known, but Edith's mother, Mary Frances Holbrook, had been employed as a governess in a southern family before she married an Iowan banker, and she likely passed the recipe on to her daughter. *Serves 10 to 12*

CAKE

3 cups cake flour, sifted
1 tablespoon baking powder
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter, at room temperature
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups sugar
 $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups whole milk
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
4 egg whites, stiffly beaten

FILLING

6 dried figs
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup golden raisins
1 cup boiling water
1 tablespoon rum (optional)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup pecan pieces, chopped

FROSTING

2 egg whites

1½ cups sugar

5 tablespoons water

1½ teaspoons light corn syrup

½ teaspoon vanilla extract

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Butter and flour two 9-inch round cake pans.

To make the cake: in a bowl, stir together the flour, baking powder, and salt. In a separate bowl, cream the butter until smooth. Add the sugar and beat, using a handheld mixer on medium speed or a wooden spoon, until light and fluffy.

Add the flour mixture to the creamed sugar and butter in 3 or 4 additions alternately with the milk in 2 or 3 additions, beginning and ending with the flour and beating after each addition until the batter is smooth. Beat in the vanilla. Gently fold the egg whites into the batter.

Divide the batter evenly between the cake pans. Bake until a tester inserted in the center of each layer comes out clean, 25 to 30 minutes. Unmold the cake layers onto wire racks and let cool completely.

Meanwhile, make the filling. In a heatproof bowl, plump the figs and raisins in the boiling water and rum, if using, until the fruits are soft, about 30 minutes. Drain and chop the fruits, return them to the bowl, and add the pecans.

To make the frosting: combine the egg whites, sugar, water, and corn syrup in a heatproof bowl, and whisk until well mixed. Place over simmering water in a saucepan. Using a whisk or a handheld mixer on high speed, beat until light and fluffy peaks form, about 7 minutes. Remove

from over the water and continue to beat until cooled and thick enough to spread. Whisk in the vanilla.

Add enough of the frosting (about 1 cup) to the filling mixture to create a mixture that spreads easily. Place a cake layer on a serving plate and spread with the filling. Set the top layer in place and spread the remaining frosting on the top and sides of the cake, using small circular motions to create peaks.

Nasturtium-Leaf Sandwiches

The nasturtium plant, also known as Indian cress or Peruvian cress because it originated in South America, is prized for its bright-colored, trumpet-shaped blossoms, plump seedpods, and circular leaves—all of them edible. The leaves' peppery flavor, reminiscent of watercress, increases with the temperature of the growing area, but other foods quickly tame it. Little wonder, then, that Mary Frances, who loved watercress as a child, tucked nasturtium leaves into the dainty sandwiches she served at her mother's teas. *Makes about 40*

- 1 loaf white Pullman bread, crust removed, sliced lengthwise into three 1-inch slices
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup butter, softened
- 2 cups nasturtium leaves, lightly packed
- Nasturtium blossoms for garnish

Using a rolling pin, firmly roll each slice of bread to flatten. Spread each slice on one side with butter.

Reserve 6 nasturtium leaves for garnish. Finely chop the rest of the leaves. Spread the chopped leaves over the buttered side of each bread slice. Then, starting from a long side, roll up each slice into a log. Wrap each log separately in plastic wrap and refrigerate until the butter has hardened, about 2 hours. (Once the butter is hard, the logs will stay rolled.)

Cut the chilled logs crosswise into $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-thick slices. Arrange the slices on a platter and serve garnished with nasturtium blossoms and the reserved leaves.