

CHARLESTON  
*classic*  
DESSERTS

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*classic*  
DESSERTS

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*Recipes from  
Favorite Restaurants*

JANICE SHAY

*Foreword by Marion Sullivan*

*Photography by Deborah Whitlaw Llewellyn*



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*Photograph of Vacherin, page 88, reprinted with permission; © Terry Manier*

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For my sweet husband Patrick.



## CONTENTS

### Chapter 1

### CAKES & SOUFFLÉS

Almond Pound Cake	Carolina's	14
Huguenot Torte	Middleton Place	16
Sticky Fig Cake	Lana Restaurant	18
Sherry Petits Fours	Angelfish Cake Bakery	20
Silver Moon Caramel Cake	Square Onion Cafe	22
Praline Soufflé	High Cotton	24
Pecan Brown Butter Financier	Cypress	26
Lemon Buttermilk Pound Cake	Cypress	28
Chocolate Key Lime Cake	Kiawah Resort	30

### Chapter 2

### PIES & TARTS

Pecan Pie Reconstruction	Anson Restaurant	34
Lemon Buttermilk Tart	Circa 1886	36
Tarte Tartin	La Fourchette	38
Muscadine Grape Hull Pie	Irvin House	40
Banana Pudding Pie Redo	Angelfish Cake Bakery	42

### Chapter 3

### COBBLERS, COMPOTES & TRIFLES

Roasted Plum Cobbler	Cordavi Restaurant	46
Blackberry Cobbler	Six Tables	48
Peach Cobbler	Slightly North of Broad	50
Charleston Trifle	Mitchell Crosby	52
Southern Fried Peaches with Bourbon Blueberry Compote	Red Drum Gastropub	54



## Chapter 4 CUSTARDS & PUDDINGS

Mike Lata's Rice Pudding	Fig Cafe	58
Croissant Bread Pudding	Palmetto Café	60
Chocolate Pots de Crème	Old Village Post House	62
Limoncello Parfait	Muse Restaurant	64
Caramel Semifreddo	Sienna Restaurant	66
Red Velvet Bread Pudding	Blossom	68
Lemon Panna Cotta	Mercato	70
Sweet Biscuits & Orange Custard Sauce	Magnolias	72
Pecan Infused Tiramisu	Charleston Grill	74
White Chocolate Pear Bread Pudding	Charleston Grill	76

## Chapter 5 ICE CREAM, COOKIES, SAUCES & MORE

Anchor Porter Ice Cream Sandwiches	Fish Restaurant	80
Chilled Blueberry Soup	Tristan	82
Coffee and Donuts Ice Cream	Wentworth Grill	84
Killa Vanilla	Wholly Cow	86
Vacherin	39 Rue De Jean	88
Vanilla Ice Cream	Carolina's	90
Cinnamon-Rosemary Ice Cream	Cordavi	90
Milk Chocolate Gelato	Sienna	91
Pralines	Anson Restaurant	91
Cocoa Sauce	Kiawah Resort	92
Caramel Sauce	Sienna	92
Cornmeal Cookie	Circa 1886	92
Coconut Caramel Sauce	Palmetto Cafe	93
Caramel Parfait	Cypress	93

INDEX	95
-------	----

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	96
------------------	----





# FOREWORD

It's no secret that the Southerners are known for their desserts, and Charlestonians are no exception. As far back as 1847, *The Carolina Housewife*, written by a Lady of Charleston, lists some one hundred and eighty recipes for sweets ranging from the humble corn cake to the French fancy, Charlotte Russe. That the identity of the authors proved to be Sarah Rutledge, daughter of Edward Rutledge, and Henrietta Middleton Rutledge, sister of Arthur Middleton, both men signers of the Declaration of Independence, ensures the value this book will always hold historically.

Many of the desserts in *The Carolina Housewife* are clearly European in origin: blancmange, trifle, tea cakes, ginger cakes and puddings. Sweets that we consider sophisticated, such as puff pastry and Bavarian Cream, can be found within its pages, as can directions for that current rage, crème brûlée, titled by the Rutledges' "Burnt Cream." "Pour boiled custard into a dish," it reads; "when cold, grate sugar over it, and brown it with a salamander or a hot shovel." Who knew!

There are baked bread puddings: Poor Man's Bread Pudding, in which the bread is soaked in water, sweetened, seasoned and baked, and Bread and Butter Pudding, in which the bread is buttered, then layered with a "rich custard" and citron and baked. There's pound cake in the traditional pound of butter, pound of sugar, pound of flour ratio. You'll find ice creams, as well as sorbets, which are called "sherbets," made from lemon, strawberry, pineapple, blackberry, and peach.

Other flavors that are evident tell us more about Charleston's history. Apples, figs, and raisins are sprinkled throughout. Coconuts, coming in to the thriving port from Cuba with bananas, show up in several recipes. Oranges are in many. Oranges and lemons were grown locally. In fact, an orange grove once flourished inside the city, occasioning the name Orange Street. Orange trees can be found bearing here today, as do Meyer lemons and kefir limes, which prosper when planted in Charleston gardens and in pots on sunny piazzas.

And rice, the particular crop of Carolina Gold unique to the Low Country, which created its wealthy society of Charleston planters, abounds in desserts as well as savories. It's hard to imagine a recipe that showcases its delicate beauty better than rice pudding, and the one included in this book is better than any I have ever tasted.

South Carolina's Anson Mills is reintroducing Carolina Gold Rice back into the market. If you want to capture the essence of a true classic Charleston dessert, purchase half a pound and experience history when you make this rice pudding.

*Charleston Receipts*, published by the Junior League of Charleston in 1950, and presently in its thirtieth edition, gives a look into the kitchens of Charleston households in "modern" days. In a city where tradition is revered, it is not surprising that many of the same desserts can still be found, albeit with updated cooking instructions. Here still are the puddings, pones, ice creams and syllabub, and several versions of the ever-popular Charlotte Russe.

Chocolate, which was featured in only one dessert in *The Carolina Housewife*, is seen in *Charleston Receipts* to have firmly captured the Charleston sweet tooth, as evidenced in chocolate pots de crème, soufflé, meringue pie, fudge, brownies, and multiple cakes. Pecans, too, have become part of the dessert vernacular. Though not indigenous to South Carolina, pecan trees are now part of the landscape, and pecan pie a part of the dessert menu.

In *Charleston Receipts* we also find the recipe for the much-misinterpreted Huguenot Torte. As Charleston had an influx of French Huguenot settlers in the mid-eighteenth century, legend has attributed this dessert to be of French Huguenot origin. Not so. It's origins trace back to Ozark pudding and its name to the Huguenot Tavern, popular in Charleston in the mid-twentieth century, where it was served.

Today, we have it all. Here in Charleston, we are still making our favorite desserts from *Charleston Receipts*, but we are also luxuriating in the selection of sumptuous offerings available in our sophisticated culinary scene. Talented pastry chefs, chefs, caterers, and bakers are reinterpreting old classics and inventing new ways to carry forward traditional Charleston flavors. In their creativity you will observe elements of respect, humor, imagination, and fabulous flair. It is, as you will see in this book, the best of times for those of us who love the many creations of the sweet kitchen.

—Marion Sullivan

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# INTRODUCTION

*“The proof of the pudding is in the eating.”*—Old English proverb

Charleston, South Carolina, attracts hundreds of thousands of tourists annually with its rich history and languid Southern beauty. It is a city of firsts—the Charleston Museum is the oldest in the country; Dock Street Theater, which opened in 1736, was one of the first theaters in the states; a 1770 statue of William Pitt is the first commemorating a public figure in America; the first shots of the Civil War were fired at Fort Sumter; the first Spoleto Festival U.S.A. was held in 1977.

Yes, history abounds in Charleston, but it is only part of what keeps people returning to this lovely city by the sea. The gracious manners of the locals, the vibrant art community, the plethora of stores, museums, and schools, the walkability of a downtown that is as beautiful as any in the country, and always, the great food—these are more of the jewels in Charleston’s crown.

The food in Charleston is simply divine. The restaurateurs are committed to using local ingredients, and serving many of the freshest and most exciting dishes in the South. Their menus are varied and impressive, and they always feature desserts that are stand-outs. When I started researching this book, I had the mistaken impression that classic dishes were hard to find. I was wrong. The local chefs have taken classic tastes and flavors and updated them, yes—but the memories are still there. Mike Lata’s Rice Pudding is the best you’ll find, and it is a recipe as old as the city and the Carolina Gold rice

fields that inspired it; Mitchell Crosby’s Charleston Trifle would be at home on any Victorian table, and is a thing of beauty; and the cakes, pies, cobblers and puddings in this book offer wonderful new twists on standard recipes handed down for generations.

I am always pleased to meet a pastry chef. As a rule, they are the happiest cooks in the kitchen—their food puts a smile on any face, and the dish is almost never returned untouched. Can you think of a time that you blamed a case of indigestion on a dessert? No. It is always the fault of the tomato sauce, or the spicy sausage—never the chocolate pudding! Thanks to all the talented local chefs who shared their joy in the kitchen. It made my work in putting together a book of dessert recipes—choosing, tasting, photographing, listening and learning their history and method—very happy work, indeed.

Finally, I am reminded of the proverb that is often misquoted, but whose true meaning is so pertinent to this cookbook. The proof is not, as we sometimes think, “in the pudding”. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, which means that the true value or quality of something can only be judged when it’s put to use. I hope that this cookbook will prove to be useful, and will bring you many hours of enjoyable cooking and fabulous eating!

Janice Shay  
*October, 2007*

