

Elizabeth Margaret Chandler



Elizabeth Margaret Chandler was born in Center, Delaware on December 24, 1807 to parents who were members of the Hicksite Quaker faith. At a young age, after the death of her parents, she and her brother moved to Philadelphia with their grandmother. Elizabeth was a writer who used poetic verse to criticize the injustice of slavery. She also worked as an editor for Benjamin Lundy's anti-slavery newspaper, the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*.

In 1830 Elizabeth moved with her brother from Philadelphia to the Michigan Territory. While her brother was "becoming a backwoodsman," on a large acreage of prime land, Elizabeth, who called herself and brother "Strangers in a strange land," penned letters to relatives in Philadelphia. She related with nervous anticipation

the increased numbers of white settlers arriving by way of the recently completed Erie Canal and the plan for a road between the towns of Adrian and Tecumseh. However her anxiety was tempered by her experience in the Territory, which she described as "an out-of-the-world kind of place." From her perch within their "humble dwelling . . . composed of logs" that was "said to be the best log house in this part of the country," Chandler described the weather, howling wolves, and wild strawberries

of her adopted country that was originally Potawatomi land. In a letter to a

friend in Philadelphia, Elizabeth wrote about the green prairies, the rich sunlight and the profusion of wild flowers. The charm and the "religious quietness" of her new Michigan home held a special place in her heart as did the starry midnight moon-lit evenings. These descriptions of her new home revealed Elizabeth's love of nature and reflected a strong yet delicate woman.

In Michigan Territory, Elizabeth continued her antislavery work by co-founding the *Adrian Women's Antislavery Society* with her neighbor, Laura Haviland, in 1832. Theirs was the first antislavery organization in what would become the state of Michigan. Elizabeth was also a member of the free-produce movement, a small subset of antislavery advocates who boycotted slave-made goods to strike a symbolic and economic blow against slavery. Since sugar was a major product targeted by the activists, Elizabeth avoided its use in her honey tea cake, which was described as "the toast of abolitionist teas."

The following recipe for Elizabeth's Honey Tea Cake was taken from a book titled *Remember the Distance that Divides Us: The Family Letters of Philadelphia Quaker Abolitionist and Michigan Pioneer Elizabeth Margaret Chandler, 1830-1842*. The editor of the book notes that the term tea cake meant that it was baked round and cut into eighths.

Elizabeth Chandler's Honey Tea Cake

- 8 tbsps unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 1 cup honey
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 2 eggs
- 2 cups pastry flour
- 1/2 tsp baking soda
- 1 tbsps cream of tartar

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Cream the butter and honey together until smooth. Add the sour cream and beat well. Beat the eggs to a froth and combine with the batter. Sift the flour, baking soda, and cream of tartar together three times (to ensure a light cake), then sift this into the batter. Stir well, but do not beat too hard, or the soda will be over activated before baking. Pour into a well greased 10-inch square pan and bake for 30 minutes.

Note: A 10-inch round cake pan maybe used for this recipe. This cake also takes well to elaborately shaped molds.

Tested in the ECO Girls Kitchen: Our test of the honey tea cake produced a beautiful golden brown, round cake resembling cornbread in appearance. We used a delicious local, unprocessed honey in our recipe, a gift from the Balabuch Family Farm in Romeo, Michigan. We found the tea cake to be unusual in flavor with a sharp, tart after taste that we attributed to the cream of tartar, traditionally used to keep sugar from crystallizing. We would therefore suggest substituting baking power for the cream of tartar in a one-to-one ratio for baking and enjoying Elizabeth Chandler's tea cake.



Michigan Territory must have been a magical place for Elizabeth, especially after living for considerable time in the bustling city of Philadelphia. She seems to have enjoyed the abundance

of wildflowers and may have even seen some like the one pictured here: the Dwarf Lake Iris. This iris, known in Latin as *Iris lacustris*, is a native wildflower of the Great Lakes areas of Michigan and Wisconsin. Although it has always been a rare species, it is becoming even rarer because shoreline developments are invading its native habitat; as a result, it is listed as "threatened" on the federal Endangered Species list. The Dwarf Lake Iris became the official wildflower of the state of Michigan in 1998.



*Pity the negro lady!
—the outcast of a frowning fate,
Long weary years of servile bondage wait.
Her lot uncheer'd by hope's reviving gale,
The lowest in life's graduated scale.
Wilt thou not weep to see her rank so low,
And seek to raise her from her place of woe?
Or has thy heart grown selfish in its bliss,
That thou shouldst view unmoved a fate like this?*

—Chandler, from poem "The Kneeling Slave"