

THE GREAT CAKE

The Making (and Then Re.

By RAYMOND A. SOKOLOV

They tried to fix it up with brown paper collars, with longer heating times and changes of ingredients.

But after a hectic night and day session in Washington, during which both the White House kitchen staff and food writers for Washington newspapers announced a host of new recipes for the scaled-down recipe for Tricia Nixon's wedding cake, which flopped earlier this week in the test kitchen of The New York Times, the final version issued by the White House failed. Just like its predecessor.

It did not overflow the pan this time, or mess up the Times oven. But it did not cook through, after 70 minutes of baking, and it was like porridge at the center.

The trouble started when

the White House chef, Henry Haller, released to the press a scaled-down recipe of the cake his staff will bake for Tricia Nixon's wedding June 12. The New York Times home economist, Jean Hewitt, tested the recipe in The Times kitchen and it flopped. It overflowed the pan and didn't cook in the 45 minutes prescribed. Other food editors chimed in, saying they didn't believe in the recipe either.

"Are they working nights?" asked Mr. Haller. But it was Mr. Haller himself who kept the lights on in his kitchen at home last night, just to make sure he was right after all. No reporters were allowed to witness the Swiss chef at work, and therefore, when he claimed success in the morning, the credibility gap widened.

Meanwhile, another Washington cook, The Washington

Post's food writer, Mary Laster, had also been busy at home. She put a 2-inch collar of brown paper in her baking pan to keep the batter from overflowing. And she also cooked the layer for one hour—15 minutes longer than the recipe indicated—because, she said, her oven was slower than average.

Mrs. Laster's cake, according to an article she wrote in The Post, turned out perfectly. She pronounced her variation of the Haller recipe "a good recipe."

"It came out to perfection. It was light and delicious," she wrote.

The White House staff was still busy, however, with a series of official revisions of the original recipe. It is a task of textual criticism to work through the palimpsest of changes that emerged from the White House yesterday,

and corrections of typographical errors in the UPI copy.

Step One in the White House's flexible response to all the outside criticism came with the simple admission that it had neglected to mention that a collar was required. This is quite an admission since collars are used in baking soufflés, though rarely, if ever, in baking cakes (unless, that is, the cakes turn out to overflow their pans).

Step Two was a rewritten recipe carried on the wires of United Press International. This new recipe called for a "brown paper collar, two inches wide," exactly like Mrs. Laster's. The White House did not, however, go along with Mrs. Laster's lengthened cooking time and stuck to its guns, for the time being, at 45 minutes.

All of this was further complicated by the fact that UPI carried what later turned out to be a misprint for the quantity of baking powder to be used. It printed one-half teaspoon instead of the original two-and-one-half teaspoons. On top of that, both the first and the second versions had also listed the baking powder by weight—one-eighth ounce. But when Mrs. Hewitt weighed out that amount of baking powder at The Times, she found that it equalled one teaspoon.

At the same time, still another variation was being worked up by Marian Burros, food editor of The Washington Star and something of an apologist for Mr. Haller. "Here is a professional chef, whose native tongue is German, trying to explain to an ordinary American housewife something he would automatically know," she wrote.

But there was nothing automatic or straightforward about the secret changes that Henry Haller put into his recipe during that nocturnal private test. He told Mrs. Burros that he had cut back on egg whites from 11 to 10 and on flour from four cups plus two tablespoons to only four cups.

Mrs. Burros also made one crucial change of her own. She increased the cooking time to one hour 10 minutes. This reportedly led to a successful cake for Mrs. Burros.

And the White House, in turn, adopted that cooking time late in the day when queried by The New York Times. Though The Times also pointed out to the White House the discrepancy between its two quantities—by weight and volume—for baking powder, an official spokesman insisted that both 2½ teaspoons and one-eighth ounce were right. The White House also enlarged the by now famous brown collar from two inches to three inches.

Not only did the recipe change shape by the hour,

CONTROVERSY: CONTINUED

making) of a Recipe, Step by Step

but its exact origin also seemed in doubt. Originally Mr. Haller had told the press that it was an old-fashioned 'poundcake' that Tricia Nixon favors and that has been in her mother's recipe box for a long time.

But several expert amateur cooks pointed out that poundcake contains egg yolks, instead of only whites. And Mr. Haller reneged on his original statement in conversation with a friend: "Heinz Bender got it from somewhere—where I don't know."

Mr. Bender is the White House pastry chef.

"Maybe it was the homey touch they wanted," the friend speculated. "If it was Mrs. Nixon's original recipe, all the White House staff had to do was give out her original recipe, not a scaled-down adaptation of that huge cake."

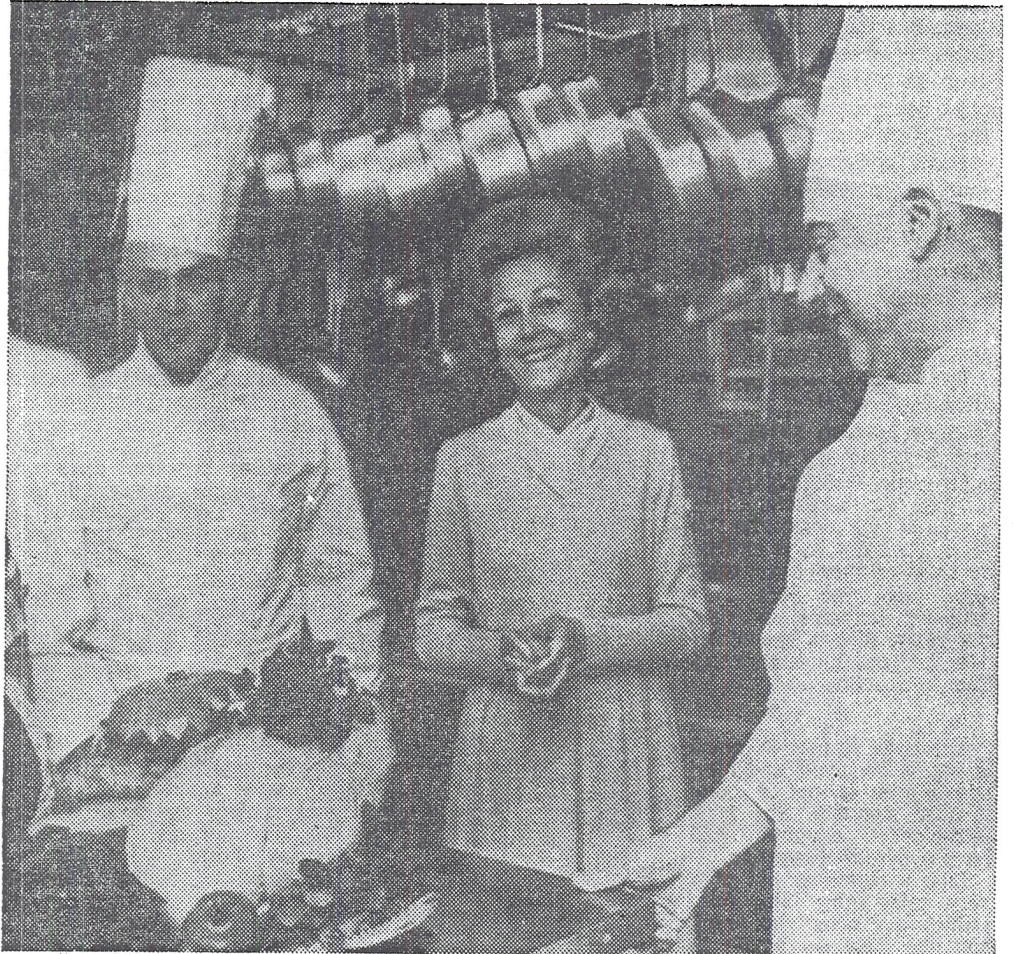
Beset by this avalanche of changes, typographical errors and variations, The Times's kitchen found itself cooking two separate cakes before the presumably final White House recipe came through.

Neither of those two cakes cooked in 45 minutes or even an hour. One finally achieved solidity after an hour and 35 minutes, with benefit of collar.

A third, assembled according to the final recipe version, shook like jelly but tasted like a very soft French lemon soufflé when it emerged from the oven late last night.

At the other end of The Times's kitchen was a very large mixing bowl filled to brimming with nearly 100 egg yolks left from two days of trying to keep up with the evolution of Tricia's cake.

Come what may, Mr. Hal-



Associated Press

Mrs. Richard M. Nixon dropped into the White House kitchen last Thanksgiving to observe preparations for holiday dinner. With her were Henry Haller, White House chef, left, and Heinz Bender, pastry chef, principals in present controversy over scaled-down recipe of Tricia Nixon's wedding cake.

ler will begin making the real cake tomorrow, one week ahead of the wedding.

When Helen Smith of Mrs. Nixon's press staff was asked how the chef could keep the

cake from getting stale, she said the layers would get an initial coating of icing right away, and the butter would be used instead of shortening.

"It keeps the cake moister," she explain.

However—the recipe put out by the White House for the icing contains neither butter nor shortening.