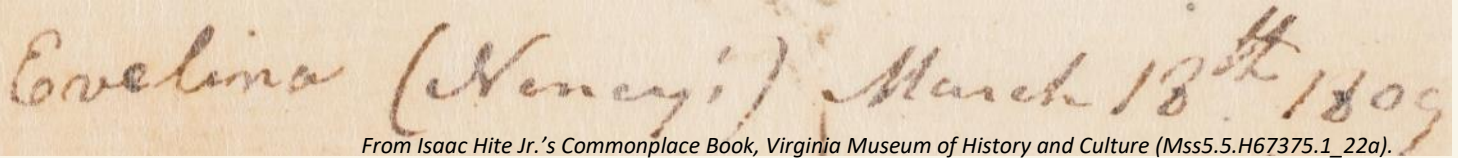


# EVELINA

## BORN MARCH 18, 1809

December 2022



From Isaac Hite Jr.'s *Commonplace Book*, Virginia Museum of History and Culture (Mss5.5.H67375.1\_22a).

Evelina is the third daughter of Nancy, whom we met last month. Her brothers, Nathaniel and Jordan, were sold into the slave trade in 1834 when she was 25 years old; six other siblings remained at Belle Grove. After recording her birth, Isaac Hite Jr.'s business records do not mention her again, but family letters do speak of her.

In 1826, Ann Hite wrote of Evelina helping daughter Ann Williams in Woodstock and returning to Belle Grove to bear her baby. The letter noted mother and baby doing "very well" and that her return to Woodstock was on the horizon.<sup>1</sup> Evelina was just 17 and not mentioned again in the decade's worth of letters that are known to researchers. There is no listing of children with the mother of Evelina in the Belle Grove records, where even stillborns were listed, so her descendants are a mystery.

However, if Evelina was shortened to Eva, which is plausible, there is another enticing clue about her in a Belle Grove Family Cookbook. This cookbook was likely compiled by one woman between 1830-50.<sup>2</sup> It gives many details about cooking styles, dishes, and food consumption at Belle Grove. Recipe contributors include Ann Hite, her daughters, and their friends, the latter of which are identified formally as "Mrs." and their last name.

Seven recipes stand out as conversationally conveyed, not submitted in written form. These are attributed to Eva, who, likely illiterate, perhaps dictated to one of the white women. These are:

Potatoes for Breakfast, Meat Pudding, Green Pickles, Cornstarch Meringue, Buttermilk Pies, Cake Without Eggs, and Soap—which was homemade in that era.<sup>3</sup>

This range of cooking skills suggests Eva may have cooked for the Hites or Williams. Eva's mother, Nancy, was a house servant and, given this role, Eva and her older sister, Sally, were assigned to the Belle Grove kitchen to learn from the head cook, Judah. In 1851, Sally was listed as "cook" to the widowed Ann Hite.<sup>4</sup> These young women stepped up to prepare all meals for the family during the weeks of Judah's final illness, childbirth, and death.<sup>5</sup> Rural plantations often trained their cooks themselves, as reliable cooks were hard to find in the slave markets.

The recipes reveal that any Hite family cook had access to a wide range of internationally sourced spices, condiments, and flavorings not available to enslaved cooks, even on special occasions. They also had the bounty of the plantation's crops, orchards, and livestock, which were much on display at Christmas, when the big dining room table groaned under a multitude of elaborate dishes.

1 Ann T. Hite to Ann M. Williams, December 21, 1826, Steward Bell, Jr. Archives, Handley Regional Library. Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society Collection THL 168, Box 1, Correspondence 1821-1826.

2 & 3 *The Book of Cooking, Cure, and Miscellaneous Farm Recipes of Mrs. Louise Davison Hite*, in private collection.

4 Ann T. Hite Estate Inventory, February 24 & 25, 1051, Frederick County Will Book 23, pp 184-90,

5 Honoring the Enslaved Monthly Feature, July 2022.

Here are two of Eva's recipes, one of which readers might find a fun dish to try for Christmas Brunch.

### **Potatoes for Breakfast (Eva)**

*Boil 4 large potatoes. Mash them, some with skin on, and then when set up right thick, pour in a cup of sweet milk, a tablespoon butter, pepper & salt, put into skillet and cook about five minutes.*

Sweet milk is regular whole milk. The phrase "right thick" does not repeat in the cookbook and could be a colloquialism. If these are shaped into patties and set into copious fat, they would brown in two minutes per side.

The second one, Cake Without Eggs, made a drier, firmer cake that would not crack or crumble when rolled into then popular Jelly Roll cakes. It is also a bridge to a recipe that an enslaved woman might make without having access to a full range of ingredients. The availability of eggs was situational to winter laying by poultry flocks owned by enslaved people.

### **Cake Without Eggs (Eva)**

*1 cup butter, 2 sugar & molasses, 1 of buttermilk, and 1 teaspoonful soda. Enough flour to make a thick batter - Bake in jelly cake pans.*

Lathered with jam or jelly, the thin cake was skillfully rolled up. With white sugar providing the sweetness, molasses was a choice made for taste and color. An enslaved woman might have substituted lard and baked the cake in a cooking pot.

Fancier cakes in the cookbook, with eggs, include cinnamon, ginger, all-spice, raisins, mace, and candied fruit bits. Ginger may have been a traditional Christmas favorite, as evidenced by the sales ledger of a Strasburg merchant, who sold a quarter pound of ginger apiece to

two men enslaved near Belle Grove, on December 23, and December 29, 1843. The men also purchased a half gallon, and two gallons, of molasses respectively.<sup>1</sup>

1 Milton, John S. 1849. "Account Book (1842-1849)." Steward Bell, Jr. Archives, Handley Regional Library. John S. Milton Collection, 1464 THL, Box 1.

## YULETIDE IN THE ENSLAVED QUARTER

It is easy to imagine the elite family in the Manor House having plentiful tasty dishes for the long Yuletide season and the unique Virginia custom of the men going out to fire their guns on Christmas Day. Much less is known about how the enslaved families under their control passed the holiday. Most accounts prop up the myth of the glory of the Old South, and kind enslavers. Historians have punctured this with evidence from diaries, but as these are lacking from Belle Grove, we will fill in with Shenandoah Valley customs in four areas: time off work, clothing, food, and entertainment.

In Virginia, freed from the frantic agricultural demands of the growing season, outdoor work lessened in winter. Activity shifted more indoors, to fiber processing, shoe making, or harness repair. Some plantations provided time off between Christmas and New Year's, one to six days, but that did not apply to household workers, who had extra work attending to visiting family and guests, and preparing elaborate meals. Some plantations, for example in the Tidewater, paid them, or gave time off later. Guests might tip, which was always welcome income.

Enslavers not wishing to be shamed by half-naked and ragged "servants," normally provided a spring and winter set of clothing of low-end fabric, consisting of undyed homespun, linsey-woolsey, and rough wool, with only one outfit of clothing provided to enslaved people every six months. But garments wore out, despite many hours of patching by weary wives and mothers.

Summer clothing arrived with the heat in Virginia, in June. Although the state is cold by October, they had to make do until December for the winter clothing ration of thicker garments to be doled out. Over time, the distribution of that garment ration had become conflated with Christmas, and worse yet, many reports describe a tableau permitting the enslavers to demonstrate their "generosity" as their workforce assembled below them on the ground. It had to be a trying experience for them, dutifully playing their part, wishing the elite family Merry Christmas, while secretly thinking, "I'd rather be free."

The Virginia clothing allowance came as ready-made garments or roughly patterned fabric pieces that the women of the enslaved family then had to hand sew, often with a single needle, and a measure of thread. To add a bit of individuality, they may have dyed the cloth using natural dyes and mordants. In reality, this task of hand sewing a dozen or more garments severely impinged upon the women's holiday "time off." Because Ann Hite writes on December 21, 1826, with her older daughters off visiting, "I have been engaged all day in cutting out the servant's clothes which is very fatiguing to me now that I am getting old,"<sup>1</sup> we can assume there was no time to have them sewn before December 25 or January 1. She seems to have had little or no assistance—perhaps a couple of the enslaved women—and the task was enormous, cutting hundreds of yards of fabric, some of it heavy. Typically, allotments for men covered a pair of pants, a shirt, and a jacket. For women an ankle length shift/petticoat, skirt, bodice, and apron.

What did holiday meals look like? Typically, Shenandoah Valley slaveholders contributed to the food supply of those they held in bondage with additional rations of biscuits or their ingredients: flour, lard, and sometimes, baking soda. It is reasonable to assume Belle Grove did the same. Adding special touches to a holiday meal principally involved their own foraging, trapping, and hunting skills. The woods

around Cedar Creek were home to wild turkeys, deer, rabbits, and squirrels. Enslaved families keeping poultry or pigs might have opted to slaughter one. Full use of internal organs in recipes from the Hite Cookbook showed rich and poor alike made maximum of the entire animal. The November slaughtering season made pigs heads available to make European heritage head-cheese or souse. Archaeology found traditional root cellars at cabin sites in the enslaved quarter, to preserve yams and other vegetables for winter use. Bacon and flour were part of the basic rations; a clever cook could construct a tasty Christmas meal, especially if a favorite cake finished it off.

Perhaps the enslaved community was allowed to glean fallen apples and other fruits from the extensive Hite orchards, once the Hite's hogs had their fill. It would be possible to make apple cider or vinegar, dried sliced fruit, and pectin, for use in setting up preserves from peach and wild plum trees.

In his narrative, Frederick Douglass notes that "sports and merriments as playing ball, wrestling, running foot-races, fiddling..." were some of the activities his enslaved community did at the holidays.<sup>2</sup> There is no evidence of anyone at Belle Grove owning musical instruments—though there must have been. "Rousing dances" were popular, on whatever scale. Reunions and visits were often allowed for enslaved families separated across land holdings. Singing songs and telling stories of family history or good yarns provided entertainment. Gifts or toys, if they existed, were whittled, or hand sewn. Though these breaks in routine may have been welcome to those enslaved by the Hites, these were mere moments in lifetimes of bondage.

1 Ann T. Hite to Ann M. Williams, December 21, 1826, Steward Bell, Jr. Archives, Handley Regional Library. Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society Collection THL 168, Box 1, Correspondence 1821-1826.

2 Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself*, 1845, pp. 73-77.

*This issue produced by Robin Young and Kristen Laise with assistance from Matthew Greer and Val Haddox with proofreading by Craig Morris.*

## NEXT MONTH WE WILL HONOR

### The enslaved of the Maury Family

Research is ongoing about the 276 men, women, and children enslaved by the Hite family at Belle Grove Plantation in Middletown (Frederick County), Virginia. Enslaved individuals made the plantation a success. Since 1967, Belle Grove has been a 501c3, nonprofit historic site and museum. [Understanding and uplifting the contributions of the enslaved community is an ongoing effort and priority.](#) If you wish to help, consider volunteering or donating to Belle Grove, Inc. at the address below or online at [www.bellegrove.org/support/donate](http://www.bellegrove.org/support/donate).

## Belle Grove Plantation

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